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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 37 Issue 4 Summer 2017



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Human Development Magazine is a quarterly publication for people involved in the work of fostering the human and spiritual growth of others. This includes persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care, education and those interested in the development of the whole person.

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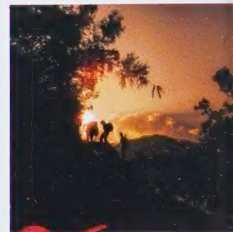
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Summer 2017

Dear friends of Human Development,

Our summer 2017 issue brings together two themes – journey and freedom.

Throughout the Scriptures and the stories that define every culture, human life is always described in terms of a journey. For the person of faith, the journey is from God and back to God, a journey often called a pilgrimage because it involves a deepening relationship with God, others and self. The very process of the journey is transformative and can be liberating. Consider for example the journey of Abraham, or the Exodus experience of Moses and the twelve tribes that made them one nation.

Jesus Himself embodied the divine human journey – in His infancy, the flight into Egypt and back again; walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus and declaring Himself to be simply “the way” itself. He showed us the way to risen life, the way of the cross that necessarily includes suffering and death. We learn from Christ that the goal of the journey is communion with God and all those who accept God’s love; it is a journey into the freedom of God, a journey which requires much letting go.

Freedom is one of the great gifts of God but throughout all generations and cultures, no one has understood how to be a truly free person. Deep down we desire freedom yet we often tie ourselves in knots. We are not sure what to do with our freedom. Our culture tells us that freedom is the license to do anything we want, with no restraints or responsibilities. But Christ modeled for us a different kind of freedom – the freedom of selfless love and commitment, a freedom most perfectly expressed in being nailed to a cross. In a mysterious way, the freest person is the one who is most committed. As G. K. Chesterton once wrote, “When the heart is fixed, the hands are free.”

Bringing together journey and freedom, it becomes clear that the journey into freedom is dynamic and on-going. Freedom is discovered as we move forward in life and learn to appreciate the treasures of God in a detached way, open to new surprises and possibilities around every bend of the road. We are now and always “on the way to freedom.”

The way to freedom involves a rhythm of detachment and attachment, a process of constant discernment. These are the thoughts of the Jesuit writer, Fr. Howard Gray, in the first essay of this issue, “Freedom and Discernment: A life-long Pilgrimage.” He challenges us to consider the freedom of the Good Samaritan and the discernment process he used as he shared the road with another traveler.

Father Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R, reminds us that sometimes the journey involves getting lost and needing to turn around and find the way back home. Through an extensive meditation on the parable of the Prodigal Son, he invites us to move from “freedom of indifference” to “freedom for excellence.” He suggests contemplating the father’s deep freedom that wishes the best for each of his sons.

Bishop Robert Morneau’s essay reminds us that we never journey alone. We accompany others in their joys and sorrows; we draw closer to God precisely as we draw closer to one another. Dr. Susan Muto considers suffering – of body or spirit – as a doorway into freedom. As suffering forces us to let go, it purifies and clarifies our understanding of self and others and allows us to begin to experience a totally different kind of freedom. Wilkie Au asks us to consider the question: Are we rooted or stuck? To be rooted is to be at home with who we are, yet open to growth. To be stuck means holding on and resisting the offer of new life that God is providing each day.

Sister Jane Khin Zaw, a cloistered Carmelite in Scotland, writes of her own physical and spiritual journey - from the Buddhist tradition in Burma where she was born to Oxford, England and Christianity; then to the monastery. On that journey, she experienced what Teilhard de Chardin would call movement into the mystery of the cosmic Christ.

Jim Callaghan, a Jesuit working with immigrants in South Dakota, shares the stories of many different people who were forced into a journey to freedom. To live, they had to die to all that they knew. He notes that despite loss of home and separation from family, they are always extremely grateful.

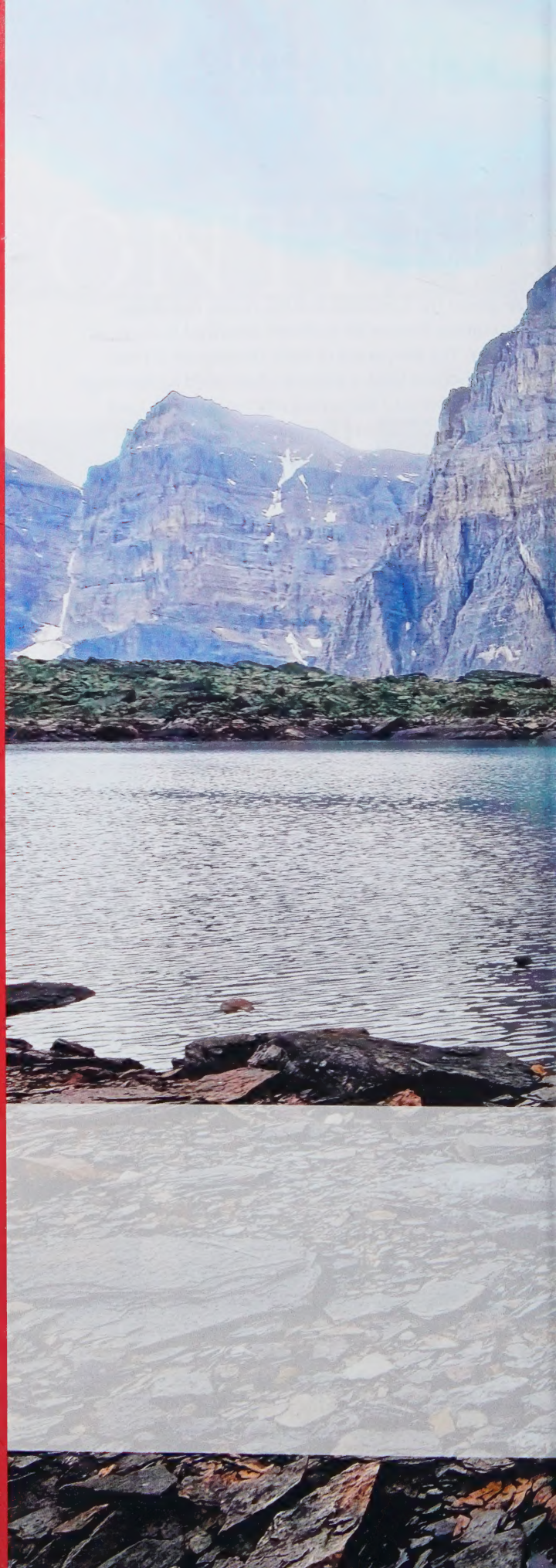
Finally, our issue has a very engaging interview of myself and Deb Shinder, a woman who has four times made the Camino (the journey to the Shrine of St. James in Compostela, Spain). The interview weaves together many of the threads that run through the other essays and concretizes the theme of this issue. She shares very personal, humbling and heart-warming stories of how she has been changed by the journey, drawn closer to God and understanding herself and people with fresh eyes. She found freedom on the road! May we all do the same!

Happy reading!

Msgr. John P. Zeng

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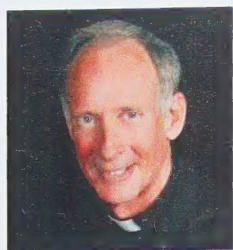




“For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery...for you were called for freedom... but do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love.”

Galatians 5:1,13

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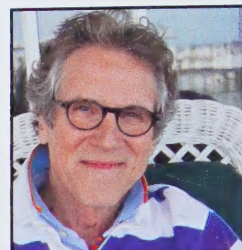
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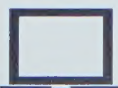
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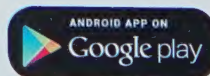
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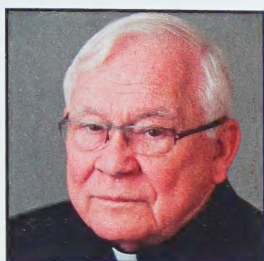


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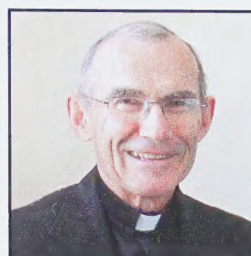




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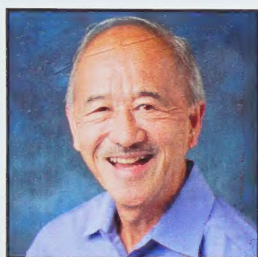
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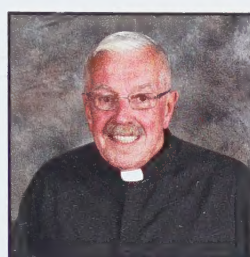
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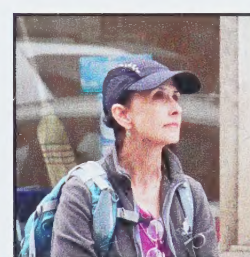
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Interview with
Deb Shinder

INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

The editors of *Human Development* are quite eager to publish articles that translate the latest research in psychology, health, medicine, and spirituality to ministry, formation and practice. Our hope is that *Human Development* will be known as the most user-friendly ministry publication. This will require making complicated theoretical knowledge, research, and concepts understandable and applicable to the personal and professional lives of our readers.

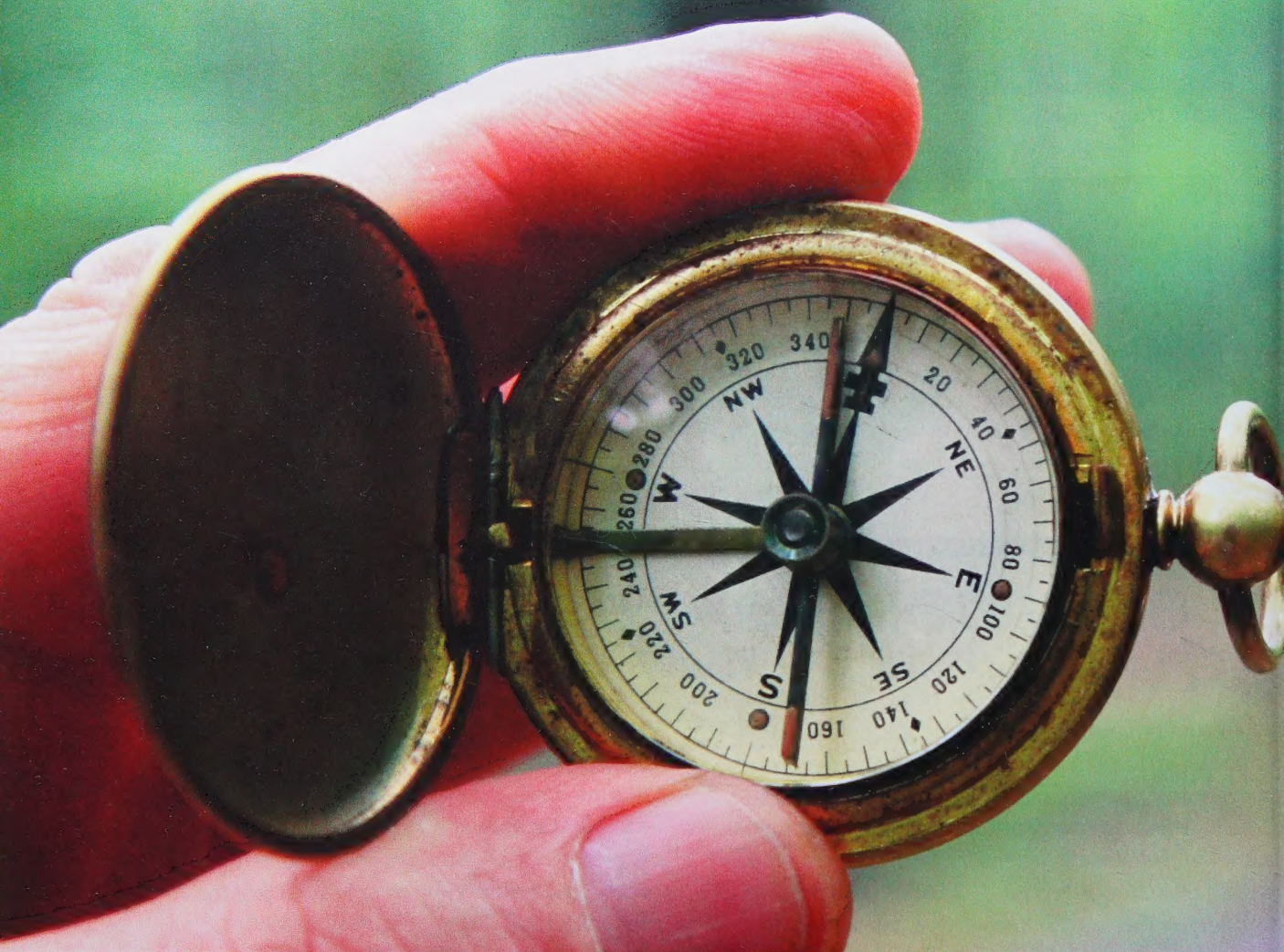
Since ministry is in a time of significant transition and change, we anticipate that the articles we publish will enlighten and positively influence the daily decisions and practices of those in Church leadership, ministry formation, spiritual direction, and counseling of any kind. There are also a number of previously underappreciated forces that uniquely influence ministry and ministers: cultural, organizational, and situational factors. We intend to highlight and honor these factors in the pages of *Human Development*. Accordingly, we ask prospective authors to be mindful of these considerations in their manuscripts. Manuscripts are received with the understanding

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Manuscripts should be submitted to Msgr. John Zenz at editor@hdmag.org as an email attachment.



FREEDOM AND DISCERNMENT

A LIFE-LONG PILGRIMAGE

Fr. Howard Gray, SJ



INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

The introduction to an article or a book usually comes at the end of the process of writing. Things get clarified in the act of speaking and writing. Such is the case with this article on discernment: in the process of living, we discover a certain dynamic back and forth between freedom and discernment.

As St. Ignatius of Loyola teaches in the beginning of the Exercises, you cannot truly discern unless you are in a state of spiritual freedom. But spiritual freedom requires a pilgrimage of discernment. There is a freedom required for any genuine discernment and thanks to healthy discernment, a person grows into even greater freedom for loving commitments, healthy relationships and genuine service. This dynamic might actually be called a “pilgrimage,” a process of discovery and letting go to become more Christ-like.

Hopefully by the end of this essay, you will have experienced the pilgrimage of discerning with full freedom.

THE CHRISTIAN CONTEXT OF DISCERNMENT

Most people understand discernment as deciding the right thing to do. I would back this up a bit and say that discernment is about the choices I make because of the kind of person I want to be and my hopes to impact the well-being of others as well.

For example, if I want to be a loving parent who helps her/his children to grow into healthy and happy adulthood, I offer them an example of love and concern that encourages, guides and challenges them in ways that are appropriate to their ages, temperament, talents, and circumstances. In other words, my self-identity meets their self-identity. Genuine discernment involves a certain amount of adaptation; otherwise, it would be imposition.

From the outset, discernment involves a freedom both in self-awareness (I want to be a good parent here and now in this concrete situation) and in self-expression (I want to adjust my parenting ideas to where the child I love may be at this moment in her/his development). While this can sound a trifle abstract, actually it is very concrete and real. Parenting well involves constant negotiations between the good I want to accomplish and the good appropriate for this time and in this place. Such decision-making goes on all throughout our lives.

DISCERNING WITH JESUS

Being a Christian does not mean withdrawal from life but living our ordinary experiences of joy or sorrow with greater intensity and awareness, seeking to interpret our experiences in terms of Christ's values. How do we accomplish this challenge? By reflecting, meditating, and contemplating on the gospel. Unfortunately, the gospel has too often been treated as a proof-text or as an inspirational moment. But the gospel is a way of seeing the meaning of Jesus' life for my life. The gospel calls me to live my life in some way as Jesus lived his. The integration of reflecting on the gospel and then living out its implications is frequently inspiring, often challenging, and ultimately consoling. I will use two Lucan gospels that illustrate the priorities of Jesus and the way we can make His priorities our own.

THE PRIORITY OF JESUS: LIBERATION (LUKE 13:10-17)

In this episode, Jesus enters a synagogue on the Sabbath. He notices a woman who has been bent over for eighteen years. Jesus spontaneously approaches her and cures her of her affliction. The president of the synagogue, annoyed that Jesus has disrupted the Sabbath protocol, castigates the synagogue congregation, telling them that there are six days for work so they should come on one of those six days to be healed, not on the Sabbath. Jesus in turn speaks to the synagogue and says, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

I can think of no more succinctly effective episode to dramatize why Jesus came to be with us: He came to free us! The scene is one of liberation, but liberation on many levels. Let us unpack these levels.

First, Jesus Himself is a truly free person. Empty of any ego that would have inhibited His availability to others, He is able to grasp the full depth of the anguish before him. He sees much more than the woman's physical suffering; He sees the psychological torment of her isolation, the misguided interpretations of her condition as the result of some sort of personal sin, and the long anguish of body and spirit that she has had to endure. Second, Jesus liberates the woman from all the burdens of her slavery. Third, Jesus liberates the synagogue congregation from understanding the Sabbath as primarily a day of legal constraints and leads them into a new paradigm for Sabbath: acknowledging and celebrating the presence of God in their midst. Finally, we can even suggest that the president of the synagogue is, at least, offered the liberation of seeing his office beyond that of being the gate-keeper of rules to being the steward of the love of the community enjoying the recreation that the Sabbath was meant to represent.

Jesus could narrate the parable because he was the parable. Throughout his ministry Jesus was free enough to see what was really going on in front of him.

The significance of Jesus' action on this particular Sabbath can be appreciated in the light of an earlier Sabbath scene in another synagogue, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Recall how Jesus was given the scroll of Isaiah to proclaim these words:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the oppressed free,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And after he had rolled up the scroll and returned it to the attendant, Jesus then said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). In other words, from the outset of his public ministry Jesus came to liberate, to set people free.

THE PROCESS OF LIBERATION FOR JESUS (LUKE 10:25-37)

Our second gospel scene is also from Luke. If liberation, making people free, is the mission of Jesus, then how does one come to be free according to Jesus? One answer to this process of becoming free can be found in a narrative familiar to all of us, the parable of the Good Samaritan. Recall how a lawyer, "an expert in the law," tested Jesus. The lawyer posed two questions: what must I do to be saved and then who is my neighbor? Jesus has the lawyer answer the first question according to his own insights, quoting the Shema about the love of God and Leviticus about the love of the neighbor. The lawyer's second question occasions one of the great parables of Jesus, the Good Samaritan.

We know the story well. We also recall how after Jesus has told the story and the lawyer has begrudgingly identified the genuine neighbor as "The one who had mercy on him," Jesus said simply "Go and do likewise." It is this command that I want to explore. For Jesus' "likewise" is not simply asking us to do "good things" to and for other people; He is suggesting a discerning process that calls us to be free enough to discover the true good we can do to and for the neighbor.

In the parable, there are four actions that distinguish the Samaritan: (1) he sees, (2) he feels compassion for the victim, (3) he bandages the victim's wounds, places him on his own donkey, brings him to the inn, and there continues to care for him. Finally, (4) he enlists the innkeeper, paying him to continue caring for the victim and promising to return later to pay anything else that might be owed. It is these four movements that both liberate us and make discernment possible.

Jesus could narrate the parable because he was the parable. Throughout his ministry Jesus was free enough to see what was really going on in front of him, an action characteristic of him: "When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them because they were distressed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Jesus' "seeing" allowed the reality of the other to become his reality, to dwell within his consciousness, to constitute his vision. This kind of "seeing" distinguishes the Samaritan from the priest and the Levite who "saw" only an obstacle, a hindrance, perhaps even a threat and so they passed far to the other side of the road. The priest and the Levite quite simply avoided the reality before them. They saw but did not truly "see."

The Samaritan drew closer to the “obstacle” and discovered a human being alone and wounded. The Samaritan drew closer to the “hindrance” and discovered an opportunity to help someone with scarcely any reason for hope. The Samaritan drew closer to the “threat” and recognized his neighbor and brother. When Jesus summons the lawyer to go and do likewise, Jesus is challenging him to become free enough to be fully engaged with reality.

The Samaritan felt compassion, which opened his heart to a new birth of “freedom”: to be free enough to recognize the vulnerability and fragility of our human fellowship, to embrace the anguish of the cruelty and suffering we can inflict on others simply because they are different or vulnerable or just the stranger who gets in the way. Jesus describes a heart free enough to be touched by what it sees, willing to bear the burden of sorrow and ready to help relieve it.

The Samaritan does what he can. He is not a policeman who can hunt down the robbers. He is not the physician who can provide professional care. He is simply another human being who offers what is immediately available to him to meet the crying elemental need of another human being. He is simply the authentic neighbor.

The Samaritan even adds another dimension to the narrative: he enlists the aid of someone who will provide continued care for the wounded neighbor. Through the involvement of the innkeeper, the Samaritan created a network of compassion that will keep “making the neighbor.”

The strategy for opening oneself to Christ-like freedom is, then, cultivating attentive living by letting all reality be part of my humanity, by learning to let my heart be moved by what I see, by doing the good I am capable of doing here and now, and by creating a network or community that tries to sustain these values--be it in a parish, a school, a work place, a neighborhood.

Each of these four movements in the parable can be expressed in a variety of ways. For example, “seeing” is a contemplative kind of living, taking time to be aware. “Compassion” emerges from our human heart but needs to be identified, honored, and cultivated so that it moves beyond a sympathetic instinct to a habit of conscious response. Jesus portrays the Samaritan as a person who does the practical good available to him. We learn to recognize and appreciate abilities that can develop into skills to help others; this means recognizing that my talents are gifts intended to help others. Finally, the enlisting of the innkeeper to sustain the initial good work underscores that beyond our personal good lies the opportunity to help my own circle of influence to be a common good for others. I learn the value of teamwork, of generative outreach to help others learn how to be healers and helpers rather than detached spectators.

Christian discernment emerges out of a context of knowing Jesus. Granted; coming to know Jesus is a lifetime process, surrounded by grace from beginning to end, completed only in the mystery of God’s eternity. Still we begin here on Earth with our histories, cultures, education, and experiences. In the spirituality that has formed our consciousness, praying the Gospels means learning the priorities of Jesus and the strategy of Jesus as the safest and sanest foundation for discernment.

DISCERNMENT FLOWS FROM A FREE HEART

A good working description of discernment is the following: “a time-honored practice in the Christian tradition. In essence, discernment is a decision-making process that honors the place of God’s will in our life” (Joe Paprocki, D.Min., “Discernment: Making Inspired Choices” from the Loyola Press, A Jesuit Ministry). Ignatius Loyola, of course, did not invent the term; but he did utilize the tradition and employed the discernment process extensively in his *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, and his letters. The so-called *Autobiography* (better *Acta*) of Ignatius is a reflection of how discernment



entered into his own conversion and oriented him towards a new way of service in the Church, the Society of Jesus. For Ignatius Loyola the process of discernment is a reflective reading about where the moods, ideas, inspirations, desires, and variety of affective states lead a woman or man in her/his efforts to discover what God is saying to them about decisions in their life. Let me unpack this description a bit.

Discernment is not simply a kind of spiritual curiosity about God but a sincere effort to make God an explicit partner in what I want to do with my life, what new turn I want my life to take or how to deepen a life-decision already made and lived.

Discernment, as a serious search for God's leadership in my life, clearly demands an explicit spiritual climate. In the first section of this essay on knowing Jesus and his priorities and strategies, I have outlined that spiritual context. I want to emphasize that context as an essential part of a discernment process.

Discernment presumes freedom, the ability to read God's action in my prayer, reflection, desires, and history. To assess our compatibility with this spiritual freedom, at the outset of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius presents the foundation for spiritual freedom

in the exercise entitled "Principle and Foundation."

"The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Creator and Lord and by so doing save his or her soul; and it is for the human person that other things on the face of the earth are created, as helps to the pursuit of this end.

"It follows from this that the person has to use these things in so far as they help towards this end, and to be free of them in so far as they stand in the way of it.

"To attain this, we need to make ourselves indifferent towards all created things, provided the matter is subject to our free choice and there is no prohibition. Thus for our part we should not want health more than sickness, wealth more than poverty, fame more than disgrace, a long life more than a short one—and so with everything else; desiring and choosing only what conduces more to the end for which we are created."

The language is clear and demanding, which explains, in part, why a guide is so important in making the Spiritual Exercises and, indeed, to live spiritually. Ignatius is saying that nothing must be more important than God or we risk making some other thing our "god"—power, money, prestige, a political position, tenure. But all this must also be understood in the context of love of neighbor.



In the language of the Principle and Foundation, the operational word is indifferent. The meaning of this word is important in Ignatius. He does not mean being aloof or having no emotional loyalties. It is not the indifference of Dives to the suffering Lazarus at his threshold.

Perhaps an alternative word could help: “detachment” that is, acting out of freedom of the spirit, without a selfish agenda of any kind. It means a “letting go” so as to be available for a greater good, a deeper spiritual relationship with the Lord. “Detachment” could well describe the equanimity of the Apostles who dropped their nets and left their families to follow Jesus.

Ignatius is saying that in a world of competing goods, when a person faces a choice, she or he has to be in spiritual balance. It also means that you cannot be free to choose unless you are aware of your lack of freedom, your own psycho-spiritual biases and prejudices, your deeper fears and anxieties. Such healthy self-knowledge implies, as well, genuine humility, an openness of head and heart towards truth.

Where does this analysis bring us? A spiritually free person needs a working self-knowledge of himself/herself before God, aware of both strengths and weaknesses. It also means knowing that I am deeply loved by God as I am. I allow my psychological, ethical, social and historical reality to be totally

embraced by God. Mercy is not a kind of divine amnesia but a total divine acceptance. Forgiveness does not ignore sin but sees sin for what it is; forgiveness sees sin within a beloved creature who remains beloved – no matter what!

As I write these words, I have been thinking about a conversation I once had with a fellow priest. I had said that God cannot be unloving. The priest objected, “God does not love the souls in hell!” My response was, and remains, hell is hell because we have made ourselves incapable of returning love to an ever-loving God. God cannot betray God’s very self.

A man or woman of Christian freedom knows the Father of Jesus, the Father that Jesus portrayed in Luke 15. In love I am free enough to be honest about who I am before God. In spiritual freedom, I honestly reflect about the directions in which I am pulled toward God and away from God; I know when I am not loving in the likeness of Jesus Christ. In short, discernment is not a technique but a way of life that leads to loving authentically, to love as God loves. The power to live that way is spiritual freedom. But that power is God-given; it is grace and this leads us to our third section in this essay.

DISCERNMENT AS A PILGRIMAGE

Prior to discussing discernment as a pilgrimage, I want to make a few clarifications. **First, discernment can be of two kinds:** (1) assessing the various

movements in my life as being either from God or from “non-God,” leading to what Ignatius terms either consolation or desolation and (2) discernment can be about the movements (inspirations, affective drives, moods, etc.) that are leading me towards discovering where God wants me to move with my freedom, i.e., about significant life-choices.

The first set of movements is called “discernment of spirits,” an awareness of the psycho-religious influences that move within my life. The second set of movements is called “finding God’s will” an awareness of where God is calling me as I head towards a significant choice for my life. Most of us are aware of the interior movements that pass through our consciousness every day.

Discernment asks: where do these moments come from and where do they lead? For example, I may notice a pattern of unease or even fear before authority and how this fear might inhibit my life. In the process of discerning that movement (or “spirit”), I realize that this fear of authority might have been planted long ago in some childhood experience and lodged itself in my psychological make-up. I also realize that this fear of authority causes me not to speak out when I should, or conversely, makes me hostile before authority figures. Just realizing that this authority problem has a history can be an important step towards being free of its tyranny over me.

The second kind of discernment centers more on significant life choices, e.g., marriage, a major job change, retirement. In this process I consider the movements that guide me. I am consciously focused on how God is speaking in the process. Here the patterns of consolation and desolation are important. Consolation refers to gifts that originate from God and lead to a closer relationship to God, the virtues of faith, hope and love, attraction to the person and mission of Jesus, etc. Desolation moves in the opposite direction, e.g., cynicism about belief, despair, enmity, lack of peace and restlessness, etc. Clearly what I mentioned earlier is important, the wisdom of having a guide throughout the second process, moving

towards a more significant life decision and finding God’s direction in that process.

The second clarification should be obvious enough. Although we have been speaking about individual discernment, discernment can also be communal. In communal discernment, the processes are more complex but still manageable, provided folks have the time and are willing to dedicate the time.

From all that we have laid out, it is clear that discernment—whether individual or communal, whether in ordinary Christian life or at times of major decision making—is not a technique to be interjected from time to time. It is an on-going way of life. As we have tried to show, discernment emerges from a specific context, the following of Jesus Christ’s non-negotiables and the implementation of Christ’s strategies. Discernment can happen only if it is done in the context of freedom. So, a further question emerges: **What is a discerning way of life lived in freedom?**

We could call a discerning way of life lived in freedom a “pilgrimage.” We have a basic appreciation for what a pilgrimage is and its role in human and religious life. It is a sacred journey undertaken to show devotion towards someone or something holy, or it is an ascetical undertaking to do penance for one’s sins, or it is a spiritual journey towards better self-understanding before God. Recent theological studies about pilgrimage have found it helpful to make a distinction between a pilgrim and a tourist. It is this distinction I want to employ.

A tourist passes through a city, a country, or a region, led by curiosity and/or seeking diversion. A tourist frequently wants to journey elsewhere but without abandoning all the conveniences of her/his home culture. On the other hand, a pilgrim lets the entire pilgrimage experience pass through her/him. A pilgrim accommodates to the specific realities of food, lodging, travel accommodations, language, and local customs. The tourist wants to be entertained, while the pilgrim wants to be graced.

The figure of the pilgrim and the symbol of the pilgrimage are significant imaginative influences in literature, art and religious culture. As I write these words I think of one of Yeats' most elegant short poems:

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars. (When You Are Old).

There is a "pilgrim soul" in each of us, the part of our being that searches for that "pearl of great price" that only God can yield - not in response to our demand or earning it but totally from God's unmerited, ever-surprising love. Discernment has to be understood and appreciated in the context of "spiritual aesthetics," not in terms of "ascetical engineering." Discernment is part of the deeply human quest for wisdom and love.

DISCERNING ON THE ROAD AND AT TABLE

One of the most beautiful moments in our Gospel revelation is the Lucan pericope of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). It is a narrative about discernment as the Risen Christ leads the two disciples from their estrangement, confusion, skepticism, and heartache—their desolation—into a

new understanding of the meaning of his Passion and Death as a fulfillment, not a failure. Gradually as the two are led by the stranger on the road to a deeper insight into who the Messiah was meant to be, they came to believe the stories of the women who said that they had seen the Risen Lord. Moving away from the isolation of their disappointment, the two disciples press this stranger on the road: "Stay with us." They have become to this stranger good Samaritans. And then in the human moment of eating together, their "guest" becomes the host, breaking the bread, blessing it, and giving it to them.

The two realize that the stranger is no stranger but Jesus Risen. With the memory of how their hearts were "burning" within them, the two returned in haste to the once abandoned community and added their encounter to the wonderful common narrative of how much the Risen Lord wanted to be in their midst, helping them discern how to become disciples all over again.

The narratives of discernment, stories of the movement from desolation to consolation, the parables of seed lost in the darkness of the soil becoming a great harvest, the transformation of the outsiders becoming the core of the Kingdom of God—all these are discernment stories. We are blessed to be living at a time when developing a discerning heart can become central to our Church and its ministry: "Today the Church needs to grow in discernment, in the ability to discern" (Pope Francis, July 30, 2016).

Discernment is indeed a life-long pilgrimage in a context of freedom, a journey with Christ, like Christ and for Christ.

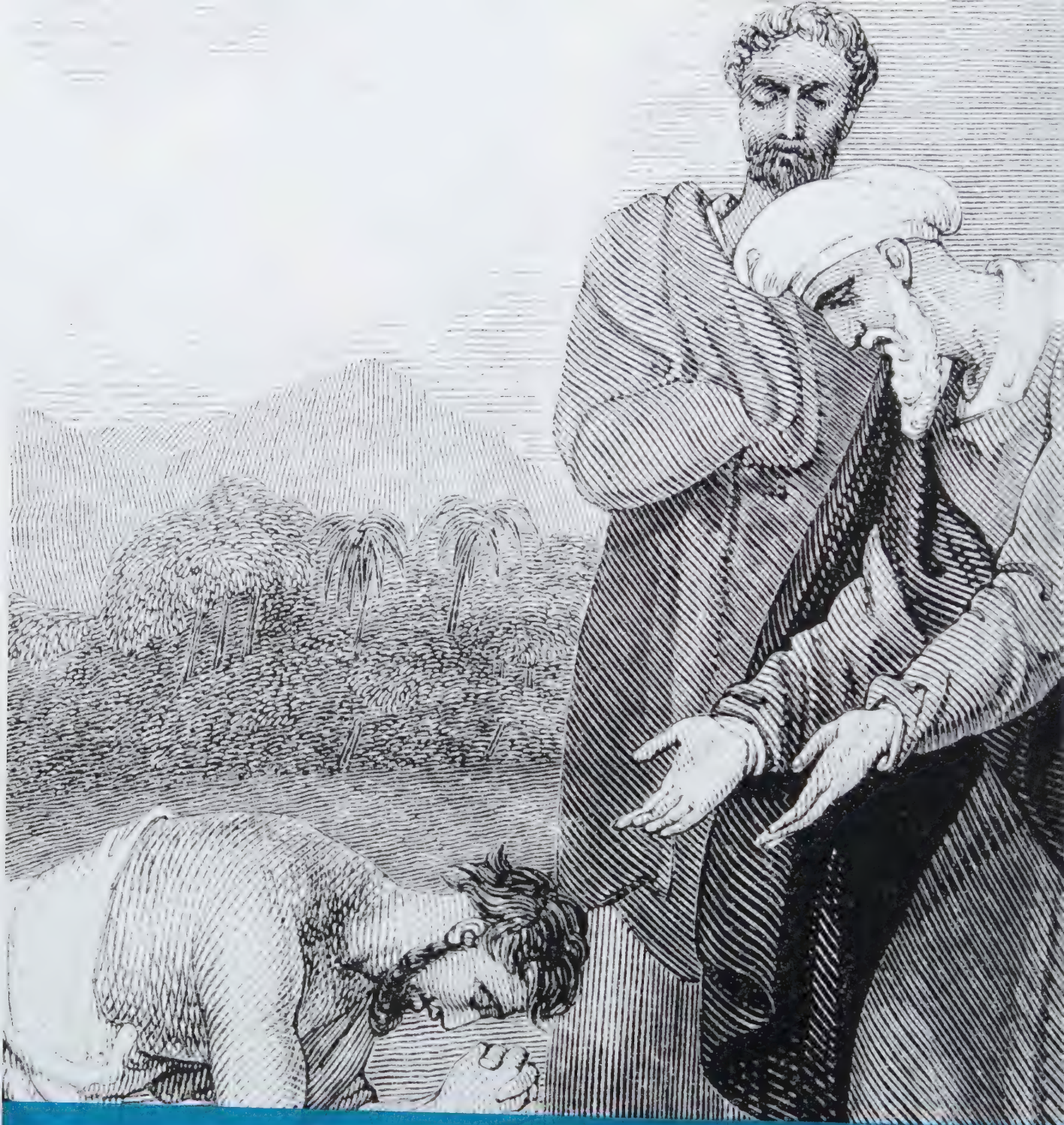
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Throughout his article, Fr. Gray stresses the fact that discernment is not an occasional decision making process but rather, a daily, life-long pilgrimage. Secondly, he underscores the point that genuine discernment should flow from a place of “indifference” or deep freedom; that is, being totally open to all possibilities and not acting out of passion, anger or fear.
2. Consider discernment in your own life: is it part of a daily “examen” or review of life-in-Christ? Does it “flow” from inner freedom or is it driven by practicalities or emotions?
3. On a larger level, how does discernment happen in your place of ministry? Are there avenues for review and evaluation? Are people acting from their core freedom or more from reaction to immediate necessities?
4. Fr. Gray challenges us to consider the way Jesus discerned and that His priority seemed to be helping people become truly “free.” Is that one of the goals of my own ministry? Do I see my ministerial role as helping people set aside fears and other burdens so they can be free to make balanced and healthy decisions?
5. The parable of the Good Samaritan offers us the model of the Samaritan and his discernment process: to “see” the situation/person in need; to feel compassion; to take immediate, concrete action; to lay groundwork for an extended caring network. Does my personal discernment take account of all these steps? Does our parish team or religious leadership pursue all these steps? Where might I/we be falling short in the whole dynamic of discernment?
6. Fr. Gray distinguishes “pilgrims” from “tourists;” pilgrims truly enter into the experience of being in a new environment and want to find the grace in what is new and different. How could I partner with God to cultivate what Fr. Gray calls the “pilgrim soul?”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

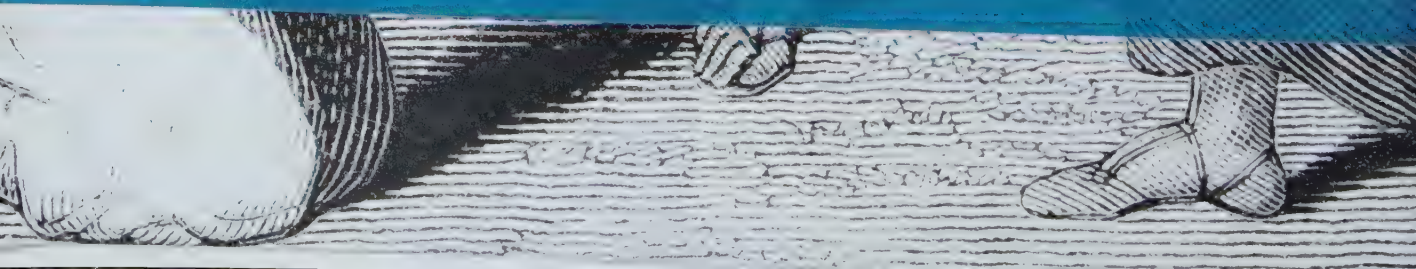
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RETURNING HOME

Wayward Prodigals on the Road to Freedom

Dennis J. Billy, C.Ss.R.





Finding the way to freedom means entering into the Father's mercy. Doing so, however, can be a long and arduous task. Why? Because freedom, by its very nature, involves choices. Often we can feel overwhelmed, even paralysed by all the options before us and it is easy enough to make choices we later regret. And when we do, it can often take a long time for us to realize that we have wandered off course, lost our way and decide to do something about it – another decision! Jesus' parable of the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 15:1-32) is a case in point.

This story puts us in touch with the dark side of our human nature and reminds us that none of our foibles, however great, lie beyond the pale of divine mercy. Jesus came to call us to a new freedom, the Father's mercy. To receive these gifts, however, we must confront the darkness within our hearts and open ourselves to the light of divine love. God's mercy, the parable teaches us, far outweighs our capacity for sin. To receive it, all that is necessary is turn to him with an open and contrite heart. The love of the Father will move us forward from there.

ENTERING INTO THE PARABLE

The parable highlights two very different types of freedom: the freedom of self-aggrandizement through personal choice (the way of both brothers), and the freedom of the father, which believes in everyone's capacity for pursuing the good through love. To see these freedoms at work, we must ponder the story imaginatively and try to enter the minds of each of the characters.

The parable begins with the younger of two sons demanding his share of his inheritance from his father. Since a son typically receives his inheritance only after his father's death, this request amounts to the son telling his father that he considers him no longer alive. His father, in other words, no longer matters to him and is as good as dead. We can imagine how hurt the father must have been by his son's insensitivity and lack of respect. But, because he loves his son, he agrees to his request and allows him to set out on his own and forge his own path in the world. The father knows well the risks that this son will face, since one bad choice often leads to another. His son, however, has much to learn. As the story unfolds, his plan backfires and sends him on a downward spiral of material loss and hardship.

Upon receiving his inheritance, the prodigal travels to a distant land and squanders it on dissolute living. Although there are few particulars, we can imagine him taking up a luxurious lifestyle with extravagant expenses for his material needs and sexual desires. It is not clear just how long it takes him to go through his inheritance, but when a great famine breaks out, he has nothing in reserve to fall back on and finds himself poor and destitute. As a result, he hires himself out to a member of the propertied class.

In his new circumstances, he finds himself in dire need. He is so hungry that he longs to eat the fodder he is feeding to his master's pigs. His sad plight forces him to take stock of his situation and decide on his next course of action. What he does next probably stems from a combination of guilt, self-pity, and calculated interest in his own personal welfare. "Coming to his senses," he regrets his earlier decision to leave home and resolves to return to his father, beg forgiveness, and ask to be taken back as a hired hand. The level of his sincerity is unclear and remains, at best, uncertain.

It appears that at least part of the son's motivation comes from a desire to alleviate his sorry circumstances and return to a decent standard of living. "Coming to his senses" may also imply his recognition of the genuine hurt he had inflicted on his father as a result of his outrageous request and the understanding that he no longer deserves to be treated as a son. In any case, he makes the long journey home and rehearses on the way the apology he plans to make to his father.

The outcome far exceeds his expectations. Seeing his returning son from a distance, the father is beside himself with joy and rushes out to welcome him home. The son barely begins his apology, when his father embraces him and orders his servants to put a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, and to dress him in the finest robe. He also tells them to kill the fatted calf, since his son who was lost has been found, and there is much cause for celebration.

TWO KINDS OF FREEDOM

The parable is rich in meaning. The prodigal son's bad choices are paralleled by those of his elder brother who, as the parable unfolds, refuses to partake in the celebration, because he feels

As it turns out, the brothers have more in common than their father's blood. Each is presented with a clear choice. Their choices also lead to some form of bondage.



unappreciated, resents his brother for having squandered his father's property on loose women, and does not think his brother deserves such merciful treatment.

As it turns out, the brothers have more in common than their father's blood. Each is presented with a clear choice. The younger brother chooses the pursuit of personal pleasure over family loyalty. The older brother opts for personal pride over familial love. Their choices also lead to some form of bondage. Each in his own way is motivated by self-interest and ends up following a path that is not life giving. The younger brother's path leads him to a distant land, the pursuit of wanton pleasure, and ends in dire poverty. Although the older brother never leaves his father's household, his inner demons keep him from participating in the joy of renewed family life.

These bad choices stand in stark contrast to their father, whose unconditional love for each son moves him to put aside his pain, embrace them with love, and shower them with mercy. His loving words at the parable's conclusion point to a different type of freedom: "My son...you are with me always, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice! This brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost and is found."

As suggested earlier, the parable presents us with two very different kinds of freedom. The brothers stand for personal choice and the will's capacity to choose whatever it so desires. A free decision, according to this perspective, means having no constraints. Whether its object is good or bad makes little, if any, difference. The will is autonomous and must be satisfied at all costs. The father, by contrast, represents a freedom that looks not to an arbitrary choice, but to the good to be done. Notice that he says, "...we had to celebrate and rejoice." (*Italics added*). Because of his love for his sons, he really has only one option: to celebrate and rejoice! — and he does so willingly. The father's freedom is measured not simply by his ability to choose, but by his capacity to look beyond his injuries and extend mercy.

The difference here is what Servais Pinckaers identifies as the "freedom of indifference" versus the "freedom for excellence." (*The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 375) Rooted in a belief in the radical independence of the will, freedom of indifference emphasizes an individual's freedom to decide whatever he or she wills—whether good or bad— and insists that a truly "free" choice cannot be swayed by any internal or external influences. By contrast, freedom for excellence focuses on a person's capacity to embody the good and embraces anything that might propel him or her towards it. A person's path to freedom will look very different depending on which kind of freedom is in play. The way of both brothers exalts self-will; that of the father, rejoices in the potential for good and the source from which it comes.

PRODIGAL SONS AND DAUGHTERS

This story of a lost and wayward son is, in many ways, our own. As with the prodigal, our path to freedom can be long and harrowing. Although it may lead us to a father's merciful embrace, much depends on whether or not we "come to our senses." For this to happen, we must first undergo a change in our understanding of the very idea of freedom itself. Our "freedom of indifference" must give way to a "freedom for excellence." Our path to true freedom depends on our decision to look beyond what may seem to be good and choose the ultimate and greater good. If we wander off this path, there will be dire consequences. Although different in their particulars, each of the brothers suffers the consequences of bad decisions; short sighted, they fail to appreciate the ultimate good.

The problem for most of us is that, in one way or another, we are all prodigal sons and daughters motivated by our own immediate self-interests, some of which are blatantly apparent, some of which are thinly disguised, and some of which are deeply hidden, perhaps even to our own consciousness. We are consumed by the power of choice, and we would like to extend that power as far as possible. We live in a society obsessed with freedom of indifference, a society that exalts our capacity to choose. The food we eat, the beverages we drink, the clothes we wear, the books we read, the games we play, the songs we sing, the shows we watch, the cars we drive, the company we keep, and so much more, are all, to a great extent, determined by our choice.

De gustibus non est disputandum ("In matters of taste, there can be no disputes"), the saying goes. Freedom of choice, what the tradition calls *liberum arbitrium* ("free will" or "freedom of judgment"), is a part of what makes us human. Unlike the other creatures around us, we are not moved by sheer instinct, but have the power to choose. This power makes us capable of cultivating both the world around us and the world within us. Our decisions have not only

external but also internal consequences. The actions flowing from them shape not only the world around us, but also our very souls.

OUR PRODIGAL ORIGINS

Our power to choose, however, has its limitations and is not an end in itself. We cannot decide to be what we are not. We are created in the image and likeness of God and must live within the limits of our creaturely existence. It is not for us to decide what is good and what is evil. Pope St. John Paul II reminds us of this truth in his encyclical, *Veritatis splendor*: "Revelation teaches that the power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man, but to God alone. The man is certainly free, inasmuch as he can understand and accept God's commands. And he possesses an extremely far-reaching freedom, since he can eat 'of every tree of the garden.' But his freedom is not unlimited: it must halt before the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil,' for it is called to accept the moral law given by God." (art. 35)

Pope St. John Paul reminds us that, in the story of the Fall, Adam and Eve misuse their power of choice by seeking to extend it beyond their creaturely identity. By eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they make themselves the arbiters of Truth and Goodness. In so doing, they disfigure their true nature by putting themselves in the place of God and seeking to become what they are not. The words of the serpent reveal the temptation to which they succumbed: "God knows well that the moment you eat of it you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad."

The sin of Adam of Eve begins a process that propels the human race into a downward spiral of sin and destruction that continues to this day. We too are caught in a destructive movement that is spinning out of control. The darkness in our world— the cruelty and violence, the tensions among peoples and nations, the lack of respect for human life, the



poverty and wars, the addictions and compulsions, the psychological disorders and dysfunctional families, and so much more—remind us of our human shortcomings and our inability to overcome them.

The story of the Fall reminds us that humanity has been haunted by bad decisions from its very beginning. This tendency toward evil is deeply rooted in the human heart and can be traced back to our human origins. If Adam and Eve were the first prodigals, then we are the unfortunate heirs of their lost paradise. What is more, we continue to act out the story of their misfortune. Deep within our hearts, we are prodigals who demand our share of the inheritance and set out on our own with little sense of the dangers before us. We travel far from home in search of fulfillment without understanding the deepest needs of our hearts. We make ourselves the purveyors of good and evil, and convince ourselves that truth is merely a matter of perspective or point of view. What we seek, moreover, lies beyond our grasp and is not ours for the taking. We make God in our own image and convince ourselves that we are masters of our environment, the world, and the entire universe. We succumb to what Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, in his last homily before being elected Pope Benedict XI, called the “dictatorship of relativism,” and relegate to ourselves the task of distinguishing good from evil, and right from wrong.

LEFT TO OURSELVES

Our actions have grim consequences. We have taken our rightful inheritance and squandered it in a distant land in the pursuit of selfish gain. We have lost touch with our souls and, sadly, are hardly aware of it. We have lost our way and do not even know it. We have been cast out of Eden and cannot find our way back. And even if we could, its doors would be closed to us, since we cannot escape the prison of our darkened minds, weakened wills, and unruly passions. Like the Apostle Paul, we do not understand our own actions. We do not do what we want, but what we hate (Rom 7:15). We are lost and need to be found. We are in desperate need of a savior. We long for a father’s merciful embrace.

Unless something drastic happens, we will continue to be the victims of bad decision-making. What happened to our first parents, and to the prodigal son and his elder brother, will continue happening to us. The Letter of James gives us a glimpse of how we get caught in this downward spiraling motion: “...the tug and lure of his own passion tempt every man. Once passion is conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin reaches maturity it begets death” (Jas 1:14). As a result of the sin of human origins, our passions have been thrown out of sync and become wild and unruly. Even so, they are still capable of being tamed and ordered to the gentle rule of



reason's reign. Sheer will power, however, cannot accomplish this end. There is a need for something extra, something beyond ourselves. There is a need for grace, and it is available! We have only to allow it to take root in our hearts.

Left to ourselves, we have little hope of overcoming the inordinate concupiscence within us, what the Apostle Paul calls the "works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19) and the "law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2). Bad decisions come about when we entertain our passions and allow them to take hold of our imagination. Once they are conceived in our mind's eye, they take on a life of their own and can overpower our better judgment and

lead to poor decisions, sinful actions, and enslaving addictions. The seven deadly sins of pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth are a testimony of human passions gone awry that have overwhelmed our better judgment. To root them out, we must have recourse to a higher power. We must put off the old self and put on the new. The Old Adam must make way for the New Adam. The works of the flesh must give way to the works of the Spirit.

CHRIST, THE NEW ADAM

For Christians, freedom involves one's relationship to the person of Christ. The deeper and more

intimate one's relationship with Christ, the more his transforming grace will heal us and set us free from the ravages of sin and death. The way to freedom involves a journey - not from one geographical point to another, but from a state of spiritual estrangement to an intimate friendship with Christ.

Jesus does not think of us as servants, but friends (Jn 15:15). He entered our world and gave of himself completely to become nourishment and a source of hope for us. He did this for one reason alone: to give us a share in the divine friendship. Jesus alone can show us the way to the Father's mercy. He alone can heal us from the wounds of sin. He alone can save us. As St. Athanasius puts it "God became man so that man might become divine." (On the Incarnation, p. 54)

The saints of antiquity were known as the "friends of God," while the documents of the Second Vatican Council remind us that we are all called to holiness. These insights tell us that we are all called to enjoy the friendship of God. We are all called to holiness. We are all called to be saints. What does this mean for us concretely? As Paul Wadell points out, an authentic friendship has three marks or characteristics. It is benevolent, in the sense that one wishes only the best for the friend. It is reciprocal, in the sense that it is free and mutual. It involves a *mutual indwelling*, in the sense that we carry our friends in our hearts—and vice versa. (See [Friendship and the Moral Life](#). pp 130-41)

A genuine friendship with God has each of these characteristics. Each of us is actively pursuing the other's well-being. Each of us has willingly entered into this friendship. We live in each other's hearts. When Jesus calls us his friends, he is telling us that he wants to dwell in our hearts and that he wants us to dwell in his. "The paradise for God," St. Alphonsus de Liguori tells us, "...is the heart of man." (See [The Way to Converse Always and Familiarly with God](#). p 395) God wishes to dwell in our hearts so that we might participate in his divine life and share in intimate love of the Trinity.

We become friends with Christ through the gift of his Spirit. This Spirit is not a spirit of slavery, but one of adoption that communes with our spirits and enables us to cry out, "Abba, that is, Father" (Rom 8:15). Christ's Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us on our behalf (Rom 8:26). It empowers us with the freedom the God's children, enables us to respond to its promptings and empowers us to live in true freedom. The freedom of the Spirit does not give free reign to the flesh but enables us to live according to the law of love. The fruits of this freedom are not the fruits of the flesh, but those of the spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22). These are the qualities of true freedom. This freedom makes us fully alive in Christ's Spirit. In the famous words of St. Irenaeus, "the glory of God is man fully alive."

CONCLUSION

Making our way to freedom is not unlike learning a new skill. Doing so requires discipline, commitment, and practice. Once acquired, however, the skill gives us the ability to do exciting new things. A new language, for example, enables us to communicate with different groups of people. Mastering an instrument, in turn, allows us to create music, play it spontaneously, and even improvise. For various reasons, we might choose not to embark on the discipline of learning this new skill, but true freedom comes when the skill, once learned, sets us free to express ourselves in wonderfully innovative ways.

Similarly, friendship with Christ, while freely offered to anyone who seeks it, must be cultivated with care. Otherwise, we run the risk of being just superficial acquaintances of his or, worse yet, estranging ourselves from Him completely and becoming strangers even to ourselves. Befriending Christ enables us to live on a deeper, more authentic level. It requires an open heart acquired through repentance, prayer, spiritual reading, authentic human friendships, and loving service to others.

We sometimes forget that the words “discipline” and “disciple” share the same root. To be a disciple of Christ means following the discipline he sets before us. Becoming his friend involves a process of letting go of the false self and uniting ourselves to him so that we might discover our deepest, truest selves. For this to happen, we must open our clenched fists and extend them in friendship to the Lord. We must set out on a journey that cleanses our hearts, opens our eyes to the intrinsic goodness of those around us, and forges intimate bonds of friendship with God, others, and our very selves.

What does it mean to be a friend of Christ? Jesus himself said: “Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps” (Lk 9:23). Those who claim Christ as their friend follow the path he has taken, the path to freedom in the Father’s love, the path to life in the Spirit. Following Christ means taking the time to get to know Him, to talk with Him, to listen to His words, to study His actions, to think like Him, and to act like him. It means, be willing to enter the world of those around us, to serve them, to become nourishment and a source of hope for them. It goes beyond mere externals, for it seeks

to cultivate a bond with him that is so strong that nothing can separate his Spirit from ours. It means being so close to him that we are able to sense the Spirit’s promptings and respond to them freely and spontaneously in a way that becomes almost second nature to us.

Jesus is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). He is the path to freedom, the path to wholeness, the path to holiness. Friendship with him means knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of the Father. It means trusting him with our very lives, because we know that He will never give up on us and is patiently waiting to lead us into the heart of his Father. We know we have followed the path to freedom to its end when, without hesitation, we can say with the Apostle Paul with open and sincere hearts, “I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me.” (Gal 2:20). The road to freedom leads to life in Christ. Those who follow it enter into the mercy of the Father and, like Christ Himself, want nothing more than to unite their wills with His.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Fr. Billy speaks of two very different kinds of freedom – “freedom of indifference” (the kind of freedom which our culture exalts – personal choice without limits) and “freedom of excellence” (a freedom that chooses the highest good for all and not just for self). He carefully delineates the struggle to break away from the dominating voice of our culture and live according to the freedom of self-sacrificing committed love. Think about your own daily decisions in things large and small: what motivates your choices – personal comfort, security or pleasure or the larger good of others?
2. The gift of freedom and decision-making can often be overwhelming. As Fr. Billy explains, the sheer weight of “gravity” and our fallen nature can easily drag us down and one bad choice leads to another. He speaks about breaking that cycle through conversion and friendship with Christ. Consider a time you personally “turned things around” in a relationship or in addictive behavior; how did it all evolve? Have you accompanied another friend or fellow minister or parishioner in making such a “homecoming” to the Lord? Are you and your fellow ministers attentive to those searching and struggling for such freedom?
3. Fr. Billy used the parable of the Prodigal Son to illustrate the difference of two very different types of freedom and the resulting journey and destination for the different characters. The father’s sense of freedom wishes the best for each son and he is selfless while each son acts of a freedom that is very self-centered. The sons do not understand love or mercy; even the prodigal when returning seems to be doing so for practical reasons. The father’s “journey” is a movement of love toward each son; he is motivated by pure love and mercy. Pray over the parable, putting yourself in the role of each character: as the prodigal can you identify with a journey of conversion? As the elder can you admit your anger? As parent can you understand the patience of God?
4. Might it be true to say that most people today don’t know what to do with their freedom?




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ACCOMPANY OTHERS ON THE JOURNEY

Robert Morneau



YOU WILL NEVER BE ALONE WITH A POET

In her autobiography *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy Day asserts that loneliness is a universal experience, no exemption. Further, it is only through the grace of community, people caring about one another, that healing happens. Hers was a long loneliness, as is ours. The call, we might say the universal vocation, is to accompany one another as we journey up the mountain of the Lord.

In his engaging work *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (NY: Free Press, 2010), the Jesuit Gregory Boyle tells of accompanying thousands of gang members in his twenty-some years of ministry in Los Angeles. He established a bakery and café to employ gang members, he buried over 175 of them who died from violence, and he offered an experience of a God of great compassion who delights in us. Fr. Boyle emphasized that we are not so much “for” others in service, but “with” others on this journey of life. His ministry among gang members is an outstanding witness of Gospel values.

Physical presence and listening are essential elements in accompaniment. The great biblical story of the two pilgrims on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) is the paradigm for how the risen Lord journeys with us. Here is our model: walking side by side, listening to each one's pain, telling our stories, breaking bread together.

Everyone, church or unchurch, is a "struggling" pilgrim. *Together* we are a pilgrim people. We all carry heavy loads, be it illness or guilt, loss of a loved one, searching for answers or plagued by doubts. Yet, our pilgrim journey is also filled with joys – the joy of love, achievement, beauty and kindness, music and the great cosmic dance in which we all participate. Yet we still have our crosses to carry, and we need one another to share both our joys and our sorrows.

We witness an example of "pilgrimage together" in *The Divine Comedy* as Virgil accompanies Dante through the circles of hell and beyond. Dante needed a mentor and guide. St. Paul had his companions as he evangelized the Gentile world. Yes, even the Lone Ranger needed Tonto as he rode the range. We are social creatures; we need one another. There is a scene in Carson McCullers's novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* in which Dr. Copland says it is a great mistake to travel alone, one of the greatest mistakes in life.

Pope Francis consistently calls all of us to experience "encounter" and "accompaniment." Encounter involves truly being present to one another, eyeball to eyeball; accompaniment means walking side by side down the corridors of life. As ships often pass one another in the night without mutual recognition, we humans often fail to engage one another in sight and sound. Often we experience some achievement or anxiety without being able to share it with someone else. Encounter and accompaniment demand availability and intentionality.

I find in the poets a language that helps us experience and understand elements of our journey together. The second president of our country, John Adams, maintained: "You will never be alone with a poet in your pocket." Over the years I have turned to George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, and William Shakespeare for companionship. Their voices and insights have often been a blessing, a consolation, and a challenge. My method will be to quote a poem that has markings of companionship, share my initial reactions in a commentary, and then describe ways the poem might be a source of accompaniment for us.

A CHRISTMAS POEM

Sister Patricia Schnapp, a Sister of Mercy, wrote this Christmas poem about Jesus, the Word-made-flesh. The verse has a powerful simplicity and a certain "sadness" that the world, two thousand years ago (and today!), fails to notice God's coming among us.

Christmas Day

You tumbled from the sky
like a snowflake
and melted into our soil,
into our bones and blood.
And so muffled
was the Big Bang
of your coming

as you burst into matter

that only an authoritative star
and merry angels
over Bethlehem
gave notice to the world
of your coming.

*The Incarnation was quite a tumble, a free-fall as soft
and as gentle as a snowflake. God entered our good
earth; God entered our bones and blood and became*

one with us. Muffled was his coming in the dead of night. Only angels and a star whispered the advent. Most of the world failed to hear, being deaf to things divine, being so busy with inane things.

Christmas: snowflakes & angels & stars. Christmas: water & words & light. Christmas: silence & presence & grace. Christmas: birth & joy & peace.

The mystery of the Incarnation reveals God's great desire to be with us on this journey. In our sacramental life – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage and Holy Orders– God's love and mercy become incarnate day after day, year after year. God is always with us - yet, as Gerard Manley Hopkins writes, "These things, these things were here and but the beholder / Wanting" (cf. "Hurrahing in Harvest"). We live a divine milieu and fail to recognize God's ubiquitous grace. Our challenge is to be present and to receive God's life-giving graces.

The Emmanuel event ("God is with us") often happens through familiar friends as well as strangers. The Good Samaritan helping the person in the ditch – an Emmanuel experience; the lawyer doing *pro bono* work with immigrants seeking sanctuary – an Emmanuel event; the mother or father sitting up all night with a sick child – an Emmanuel event. And the list goes on. Jesus, he who tumbled from the sky, continues to dwell in our soil, our bones, and our blood. We do well to look for an authoritative star or to listen for a gaggle of merry angels to take notice of God's abiding presence.

Bernard Lonergan, a noted Jesuit theologian, said the first imperative to a full life is: "Be Attentive!" Part of our Christian call is to be a "noticer," to notice the invasions of grace in daily life and to respond with praise and gratitude. When noticing also turns into appreciation, we are living our Christian calling. We are a Eucharistic people, giving thanks for God's constant accompaniment in creation, in our redemption, in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We have an "authoritative star" in Jesus, the light of the world. His life of love, compassion, and forgiveness lights the way. We are accompanied in all that we do; we are given a map for "the way." The Lord also gives us the Holy Spirit and the community of disciples (the Church) as companions on the journey.

A LOVE POEM

The Anglican priest-poet George Herbert (1593-1633) speaks powerfully of God's encounter with the soul and the divine longing that we live and travel together. Herbert's poetry has transformed many lives. In his "Trinity Sunday," Herbert concludes with the request that he might "run, rise, rest with Thee" [God]. In "Matins," the poet pleads that the Lord would "show me Thy love to know," a love that confirms the covenant that speaks so powerfully of companionship. But it is in the poem "Love" that Herbert tells of the great invitation to friendship that makes all things new.

LOVE (III)

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

Ever since reading how this poem transformed the life of Simone Weil, I have attempted to recite and pray it with intense focus. Weil, suffering from a painful headache during Holy Week, was given this poem. While reciting it over and over, God came into her life and transformed her soul. Here God is quick-ey'd Love, an initiator of friendship, and a challenging Deity who is always our divine Host. What blocks the reception of this hospitality is our narcissism, concern about our sinful past, our feeling of unworthiness, and the marring of our soul and senses. God will have none of it. We must sit at the Eucharistic table and be nourished by Love and Mercy, by the mystery of God.

Is this good news too good to be true? Does God daily invite us into the divine presence, take us by the hand, smile upon us? So often the "preached" God is disappointed and wrathful, hypersensitive and full of vengeance. Not here. Not in Herbert's experience of a God known by another poet as "this tremendous

Lover." Francis Thompson and George Herbert apparently sat at the same table and came to know the same God.

George Herbert captures well a major obstacle to the theme of encounter/accompaniment, namely, dust and sin, guilt and shame. Going back for a moment to *Tattoos on the Heart*, Fr. Boyle tells how devastating guilt and shame can be in the lives of gang members (needless to say, in anyone's life). Guilt deals with mistakes; shame with self-image. When our self-image identifies with the negativities of our personal life, we find it very difficult to join others on the journey and to believe that we are "worthy" of their presence. We then withdraw into a state of isolation and loneliness, convinced that we lack the qualities of being a worthy companion. A corollary to this is our image of God. If God is not "quickey'd Love" but rather a severe, demanding

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Judge, we distance ourselves from the divine encounter. *Tattoos on the Heart* gives a powerful image of God who delights and smiles upon us, the very qualities we read about in Herbert's poem.

God invites us to sit at table together, divinity and humanity side by side, with our God and each another. In table conversations we share what is on our minds and in our hearts. Language is a bridge offering connectedness; a gift that has the power to counter our loneliness. In Herbert's poem we witness a dialogue between God and the poet. In that verbal exchange the poet came to realize that despite his sins and shortcomings, God was pursuing him. The poem reminds us that our companion, Jesus, bore the blame and set us free.

In our human journey a significant determining factor that can make encounter and accompaniment successful or not is our countenance, especially our eyes and our smile. Herbert claims, because of sin, that he cannot look on God even though God made our eyes. Eye contact is essential to encounter. The importance of "being seen" cannot be overstated. And the smile? The poem states that God is smiling in the dialogue with the poet. One might image God as frowning when the poet confesses that he is unkind and ungrateful. But not so! God smiles and continues to welcome the poet into the divine life. William Blake, in his poem "Tiger, Tiger," asks whether God smiled when he created the fierce tiger: "Did he smile his work to see, / Did he who made the lamb make thee?" The answer is absolutely clear – a resounding "YES." God delights in the tiger, the lamb, and us.

One last comment regarding Herbert's poem. One way to short-circuit true encounter is to get caught up in activism, even the activism of worthy service. When invited to the table of encounter and companionship the poet attempts, out of a sincere sense of unworthiness, to decline the invitation in the name of service. A great attempt that failed. The Lord insists that the poet *must* sit and eat, that we all must sit at the table of the Lord, share life; only *then* can genuine ministry to others unfold.

A VIGILANT POEM

A third poet who wrote about the question of journey and accompaniment is Jane Tyson Clement (1917-2000). She and her husband Robert belonged to Bruderhof, a Christian community committed to social justice and world peace. Clement was the mother of five children and a beloved teacher. Her poem "Vigil" is a powerful example of a central element of the Christian life.

Vigil

Sometimes I have sat alone in the tall grass
by the side of the path
and watched the edge of the woods,
there, right there, where the witch hazel grows,
and the dogwood and the elder bushes,
and wondered and waited.
What would I do, O Master,
if you came slowly out of the woods?
Would I know your step?
Would I know by my beating heart?
Would I know by your eyes?
Would I feel on my shoulders, too,
the burden you carry?
Would I rise and stand till you drew near
or cover my eyes for shame?
Or would I simply forget everything
except that you had come and were here?
Today you have not come, not this way.
But that you are somewhere
of that I am sure,
and we must, each one,
have your welcome waiting.

*What would I do if Jesus came around the corner?
Blush? Run? Rejoice? Would my welcome be waiting?
He did come this morning (September 21, 2002 – 8:01,
Shawano, WI, Perkins Café). He sat across and beside
me, a double presence, in a husband (doctor) and his
wife serving the ill and poor in East Africa. They spoke
of the burden they carried with Jesus, of famine and
AIDS. They spoke of the joy of healing and the sorrows
of death and pain. Jesus did come that morning as we
ate our pancakes.*

To watch – to wonder – to wait. Sounds like a morning job description (prayer) for every disciple. Yet our vigilance is tested by apparent delays. Nothing happens – or so it seems. Perhaps the Lord was present in the bush close by and is waiting for us to turn around.

What joy in self-forgetfulness. To “forget everything / except that you had come and were here.” Gone the guilt of the past; gone the anxiety of the future; sheer presence, sheer joy. But until that arrival we remain in the middleland, struggling with our narcissism and desirous of self-forgetfulness. May all of us who keep vigil also experience compassion.

We have in these verses four W's: watch, wonder, wait, and welcome. These dispositions are essential on our spiritual journey. To be watchful and mindful, to have a sense of reverence and awe, to embrace patience, and to have a hospitable heart are ingredients of our relationship with God and one another. Keeping vigil is what Jesus constantly urged his disciples to do.

There are many challenges in being vigilant as we strive to be with and for one another in the call to accompaniment. Too easily we become inattentive to the needs of those around us and in our community. Caught up with our own agenda and demanding duties, it is difficult to be watchful and responsive to those who need and seek our attention. As for the sense of wonder, we can become insensitive to the dignity of the person in front of us or the stranger we meet on the street. Waiting for people to grow up and waiting to transcend our own shortcomings calls for graced patience. The ever-present need to have an open mind, heart, and home – living a life of hospitality and welcome – is the work of a lifetime.

The last stanza of Clement's poem might be challenged:

Today you have not come, not this way.
But that you are somewhere
of that I am sure,

and we must, each one,
have your welcome waiting.

Doesn't Christ come to us every day? Should we not have our welcome waiting every hour? Christ comes to us in the community – everyday; Christ comes to us in those who are in need – everyday; Christ comes to us in word and sacrament – everyday; Christ comes to us in the stirrings and nudges of our heart and conscience – everyday. Our challenge is awareness and responsiveness. The Lord's promise of being with us always assures us that we are accompanied by Someone who loves and cares for us.

One fundamental question we each must answer deals with hospitality: am I, are we, truly welcoming of others? Hospitality is a basic disposition of openness and graciousness. Jesus welcomed saints and sinners, the poor and the rich, the erudite and the uneducated. His was an open-door policy. The humble and poor felt at home in his presence; the proud and self-righteous were ill at ease. Nevertheless, they all were welcomed to journey toward the kingdom that defined Jesus' mission.

There is a touching line in Clement's "Vigil" – "Or would I simply forget everything / except that you had come and were here?" What a grace to be free from focusing on oneself and to be truly lost in another. Self-forgetfulness is a beautiful blessing and probably a rare one for most of us. Yet, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be for others even to the point of radical self-giving.

A line in Brigid H. Herman's Creative Prayer mentions two qualities of graced companions. She writes: "They [the saints among us] were as free from self-regard as from slavery to the good opinion of others." Their focus is on Jesus who comes slowly out of the woods.

On this pilgrimage called life we do well to sing together (and, yes, hold hands as well). The priest-poet Gordon Gilsdorf gives us the lyrics for our Christian journey:

LYRICS FOR THE CHRISTIAN

1. To Christ
You are my lantern for night,
slowly tunneling this dark,
bartering one world of light
for another, and blinding fright.
The dank air you landmark
with meaning, warmth and sight.
2. Following Christ
This way is lightly traveled. The moss
Is hardly worn from stone.
Yet pilgrims in the shadow of the cross
Will never walk alone.
3. Cross Reference
I searched
God's lexicon
To fathom "Bethlehem"
And "Calvary." It simply said:
See "Love."

Christ is the light of the world. He comes to illumine our darkness and counter our many fears: a light of truth, offering meaning, a light of warmth, removing our coldness, a light of sight, giving us perspective. This is the light of *faith*, not physical sight. This faith is the grace of conviction, confidence, and commitment. God's love and mercy surround and sustain us, faith tells us. Trust and hope enrich our lives, faith tells us. Helping the poor and promoting the common good are part of our mission, faith informs us. This song of faith has lyrics that carry our theology. Our song is a way of life, the life of discipleship and stewardship.

How many travel this road, a road less traveled, a road of total self-giving and sacrifice? Jesus is up-front: to follow him is to carry our cross. But we must remember that there is always a shadow over us, the one radiating from Calvary. We never carry our cross alone if we are people of faith.

The number of words in God's lexicon might be an

interesting topic for theologians to discuss. The poet here suggests a single word, a single word to give meaning to the birth of Jesus (Bethlehem), a single word to give meaning to the death of Jesus (Calvary) – LOVE!!! Mysterious are all births and all deaths. When it comes to the birth and death of the Word-made-flesh, we are in the deepest of mysteries. It was St. Thomas Aquinas who said the proper name of God is Amor, that is, Love. And so it is.

CHRIST WITHIN

Ruth Mary Fox (1891-1977), a Dante scholar and renowned teacher at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, offers another glimpse of companionship and the beauty of encounter and accompaniment. She reminds us just as Mary carried Jesus in her womb, we too carry Christ, the Christ we encounter in the Eucharist, to those whom we meet daily. She writes:

Carrying Christ

Into the hillside country Mary went
Carrying Christ, and all along the road
The Christ she carried generously bestowed
His grace on those she met. She had not meant
To tell she carried Christ. She was content
To hide His love for her. But about her glowed
Such joy that into stony hearts love flowed,
And even to the unborn John Christ's grace was sent.

Christ in this Sacrament of love each day
Dwells in my soul a little space and then
I walk life's crowded highway, jostling men
Who seldom think of God. To these I pray
That I may carry Christ, for it may be
Some would not know of Him except through me.

The vocation of being a Christ-bearer is not unique to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Everyone baptized into the life of Christ carries with him or her the presence of the Lord. That presence is active. God's love and mercy radiate from within unless the carrier blocks the flow of grace. What a great calling we have.

Knowledge of Jesus comes from a variety of sources: reflecting on the Gospel; studying of theological tomes dealing with Christology; celebrating the sacraments within the Christian community. But many people will not walk these paths. Most people encounter Jesus through the Christians who truly believe and live as disciples. Jesus reveals himself through their character, attitudes, values, and behavior.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the model and mother of the Church. In the Annunciation mystery, we witness her commitment to doing the will of God, despite her fear and not even knowing how what was asked of her might take place. In her encounter with the angel and her willingness to participate in salvation history, a paradigm of discipleship is manifest. Mary will be accompanied for the rest of her life and will be charged with journeying with others and sharing with them the graces she has received. In baptism we encounter Christ and are sent forth to share that new life with all we meet.

The last line of the poem deserves our serious attention. Is it true that some people in our circle of acquaintance will have no knowledge of Christ except through us? If true, we have a tremendous responsibility of radiating and revealing the mystery of Jesus, surely by our lifestyle, possibly through our words. An ancient Sufi prayer (source unknown) captures well this missionary sense:

O Divine One, to thee
I raise my whole being,
a vessel emptied of self.
Accept, O gracious God,
this my emptiness,
and so fill me with thyself –
thy light, thy love, thy life –
that these thy precious gifts
may radiate through me
and overflow the chalice of my heart
into the hearts of all those
with whom I come in contact this day –
revealing unto them the beauty

of thy joy and wholeness
and the serenity of thy peace,
which nothing can destroy.

We need to pray for a luminous heart that we might radiate God's light, love and life; we must pray for a courageous heart to reveal God's beauty and peace in all the circumstances of our life.

We carry Christ through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist; we carry the indwelling Spirit to others through the sacrament of Confirmation. And each day we meet others who carry Christ to us through their lives of kindness and concern, their witness to the Gospel, their grace-filled acceptance of the crosses they carry. In this mutuality and reciprocity of bringing Christ and receiving Christ we unleash the joy of the Gospel, the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

As pilgrims and travelers on the journey of life, our days will come to an end: to accompany others in their last days is a great privilege. One pastor of a large parish told me that no one dies alone in his parish – the parishioners have committed themselves to be present when the last hour comes for members of their congregation. Many of us stand in admiration of the Hospice ministry that serves the dying so well.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), who has few rivals in the literary world, brilliantly describes how authentic love is true to the end. Using three powerful metaphors – autumn, sunset, and fire – the Bard, whose realism is never absent, compares the end of a season, a day, and a fire to the ending of a relationship as death approaches. His sonnet claims that authentic love grows stronger, not weaker, as the last hour of life approaches.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day

As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
 Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more
 strong,
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.
 Sonnet 73

Diminishment can lead to a waning of passionate care. But there are loyal souls who, despite approaching death, love even more deeply. In such relationships, the lover sees far beyond illness or the lessening of beauty and focuses on the inherent goodness of the other. Day by day love grows stronger just as day by day the beloved nears the mystery of death.

Something stirs deep in the soul when trees are bare, when sunsets terminate the light, when a fire is dying out. A fear arises that not just things of nature but human beings as well are transient and end in annihilation. Love conquers fear and even the metaphors of nature cannot hold the soul in bondage. Spring will come to bloom the trees; the dawn will come to scatter the darkness; a new fire will blaze to bring warmth to our cold world. In the end, all will be well.

In our current culture, sometimes labeled a culture of death, we need to renew our commitment to every aspect and every stage of life. Too easily as our parents, relatives, and friends age, tremendous loneliness can set in. People feel abandoned, yes, unaccompanied in their final days. Would that we could honestly say and live with commitment Shakespeare's "which makes thy love more strong."

Among the many reasons the ministry of St. Teresa of Calcutta caught people's attention was precisely the fact that she and her community focused their ministry on the most overlooked of all people – dying lepers, the poorest of the poor of Calcutta.

Though she experienced a deep personal sense of abandonment by God and a loneliness we can only begin to imagine, this cross did not stop her from reaching out to others. St. Teresa knew what the suffering poor were going through and her own pain drew her all the more deeply into their lives. Amazing grace, indeed!

To watch the trees lose their leaves, to feel the melancholy of a day coming to end, to witness the last log lose its flame and, yes, to be at the side of one's beloved taking his/her last breath is painful. No doubt about it! The question is - are we willing to embrace the moment, grateful for graces given, hopeful that spring will come again, trusting that dawn will scatter the darkness, that new fires will yet burn, and that the risen life is a reality? Our hope lies in the mystery of the God who is Love and, as the great saints and philosophers remind us, love is immortal. We accompany one another through death into newness of life.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Bishop Morneau begins his essay noting that loneliness is a universal human experience. He implies that God created us with this inner emptiness so that we might be open to His overtures of living accompaniment and that we would want to accompany each other. How do you deal with loneliness? Has it at times brought you to self-pity or self-indulgence? Has it brought you closer to God? Has it prompted you to recognize the pain of others and accompany them?

2. Undoubtedly we have all traveled great distances all alone and at other times, enjoyed the company of a good friend, spouse, family or group of fellow pilgrims. Meditate a while on the diversity of graces in these different ways of travel/pilgrimage; there are blessings in being alone and gifts to be experienced when we are with others.

3. Bishop Morneau built his article around several poets and their imaginative way of describing journeys of accompaniment: a snowflake tumbling free-fall and melting into our soil, quick-ey'd love grasping our hand and drawing us to table, keeping vigil, searching God's lexicon, carrying Christ and death-bed love. Which of these poems and their images touched you most deeply?

4. Bishop Morneau began and ended with two saintly women – Dorothy Day and St. Teresa of Calcutta – both of whom became models of accompaniment precisely because they also knew great personal loneliness and darkness. They both found community and consolation as they accompanied the “poor.” How do I see that same dynamic being played out in my own life experience?



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SUFFERING ACCEPTED A WAY TO FREEDOM

Susan Muto, Ph.D.



INTRODUCTION

One of the many vexing questions that wells up within every human heart in every age and in every culture concerns the meaning of suffering. The Scriptures themselves grapple with this search for an explanation: consider Job, the many psalms of lament and the disciples arguing with the Lord about His Passion prediction. Every day we hear the shocking news of family and friends discovering illnesses; we ourselves live overshadowed with the unavoidable reality of some physical or psychological suffering. Why must it be *this* way? Can there be a hidden blessing in suffering?

An acquaintance of mine, diagnosed with a terminal, debilitating disease, refused treatment and took his own life under circumstances that sent shockwaves through his circle of family and friends. For him, suffering had no meaning whatsoever. Death was his last chance to control his destiny, and he executed his end with precision and, I hope, prayer.

By contrast, another friend, aware that the window of her Christian life was soon to close due to multiple organ failure, opted for hospice care surrounded by her family. When her eldest son asked her if she was afraid to die, she responded, “How could I be afraid when Jesus is waiting to take me into his arms?”

Viktor Frankl, author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, knew what it was like to feel abandoned at the bitter edge of despair. Actual death—self-inflicted or caused by his captors—was one option that had to be faced by concentration camp victims like himself, but Frankl chose another path. He opted to turn from the lament of mere meaningless to the mysterious truth of how to suffer meaningfully in body, mind, and spirit. He recognized that even if a logical answer to suffering eludes us, we can find a way to accept this cross and deal with it courageously. We can avail ourselves of the grace to move from the jagged edge of lamentation through the window of love for life to the restoration of hope for the future. With the psalmist we can pray:

Answer me quickly, O Lord;
my spirit fails.
Do not hide your face from me,
or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.
Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,
for in you I put my trust.
Teach me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.

(Psalm 143:7-9)

In the Book of Job, we meet a man who, like Frankl, survived great suffering and grew wise. Job did not find the meaning of his painful fate in theological explanations. None of them made any sense to him. While no amount of reasoning could explain his plight, he had faith in the Voice that spoke to him out of the whirlwind and swept him up to a new level of meaning that enabled him to pray:

‘I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

“Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?”
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
“Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to me.”
I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes’ (Job 42:2-6).

In his edifying account of his experience as a patient with terminal cancer, the Quaker author, Bradford Smith, shifted what energy he had left away from focusing on the premature ending of his life to writing a will, providing for his family, and saying good-bye to loved ones left behind. He dwelt by choice on the loving embrace of God and the new life awaiting him after death.

“The discovery that you have cancer is also the discovery that you are going to die. Not necessarily from this cancer, this operation, for you may still live to die of heart disease or falling down the cellar stairs. But the message now comes home, strange and yet familiar; I too am mortal. By necessity then you are led to meditation, even if you have not been much given to it before. In the long dark hours after the hospital has quieted down, in the period when a half-departed anesthesia has left your body, and, in the surge of new life that comes with recuperation, there are rich opportunities for facing what you have to face, savoring all that memory brings you as its gift, and knowing more clearly than ever before what you want to do with the rest of your life.

I thought I would feel cut off by my illness from the rest of the human world. Instead, I found that human contacts grow warm, they glow, when you are in trouble. Family loyalties strengthen. The bonds grow firmer with friends and neighbors, and we become as one family. Distant friends somehow learn

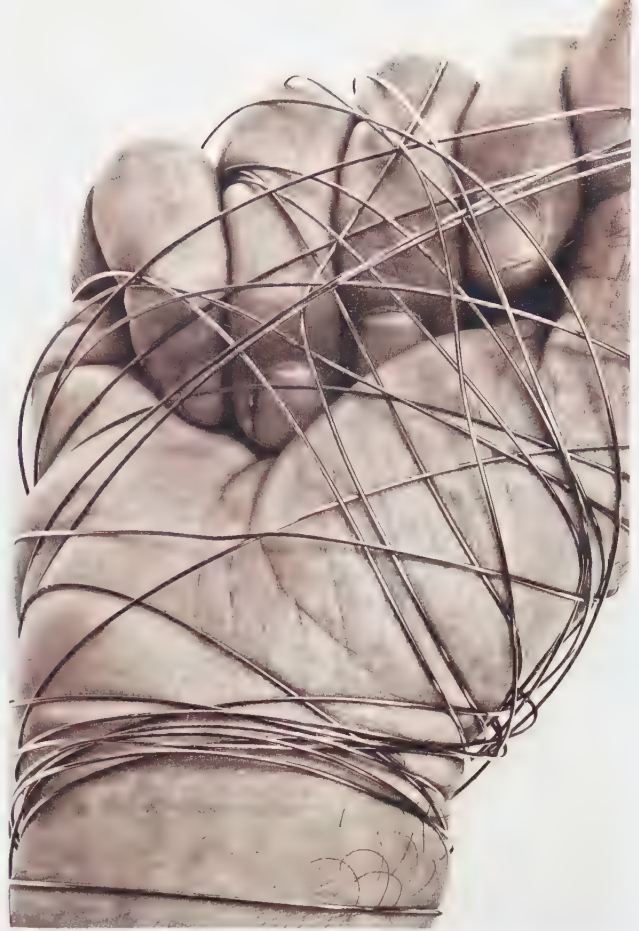
what has happened; you hear from boyhood chums with whom you had lost all contact. The grandsons who come to visit on the lawn outside the hospital window—how additionally precious are their unseamed faces, their clear voices, their handsome soundness of feature and limb (Dear Gift of Life, pp 5-7).”

A SUFFERING MYSTIC

A classic Christian mystic who faced his mortality and chose to see life’s meaning as an opening to rather than only a closure of our earthly window was the Carmelite reformer, St. John of the Cross (1542-1591). When he joined the reform started by St. Teresa of Avila, he aroused the ire of his original order. The friars who opposed renewal efforts kidnapped him in 1577 and imprisoned him in their monastery in Toledo, Spain. There he suffered for nine months in a dark, filthy, cramped cell, surviving by composing poetry he had to commit to memory because he had no writing materials.

Sensing that his death was imminent, he planned his escape, tying rags together and climbing from a narrow window to a steep drop he somehow survived. He made his way to a nearby convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns, who protected him from a band of captors bent on jailing him again. The nuns tended his wounds and, in turn, he dictated his poems to them word for word, and later accompanied them by a prose commentary that gave birth to four masterpieces of mystical literature: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love*.

What made his prison experience bearable and gave meaning to his suffering was the force of his love for Christ. So profound was his belief in the Paschal Mystery that it moved him to identify his “sad night” of suffering as a “glad night” that obscured the intellect’s habitual way of understanding and gave way to the gift of mystical knowledge of divine and human things. The midnight hours of pure faith he endured purged his will of all its inordinate



attachments and affections, thus readying him for sublime touches of divine love. This trial in the midnight hours of his imprisonment stripped his soul of its memory of consolations in the past and left him feeling empty and poor, thus leading him to experience the peace that passes understanding.

In *The Living Flame of Love*, St. John’s teachings about the meaning of suffering in the Christian life soar to a crescendo of contemplative wisdom. A great measure of the delight he felt stemmed from the fact that the Divine Initiative drew him to new depths of love and service without his really doing anything. It was as if an immense flame (God’s love) barreled into the narrow corridor of his will. The more this living flame penetrated the walls of his will, the weaker they became. At the point of collapse, he accepted fully that without God he could do nothing.

Our will is like those walls. Only when we experience the total breakdown of self-reliance can we begin the lifelong process of surrendering freely to God on whom we depend for everything. The deeper God carves his will on the walls of our inner life,



the more we suffer from the utter inadequacy of clinging to anything or anyone as ultimate. Every taste of life, even the best it has to offer, has its limits. Yet with God as the main guest in the home of our heart, every event that occurs, however lamentable it may be, takes on a new meaning. Love this mature conveys, beyond bodily gratification or actual achievement, unending gratitude and lasting joy.

A SUFFERING MARTYR

A contemporary martyr for the faith, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), was born in Breslau, Germany, enjoyed a happy childhood and a distinguished scholarly and pastoral career in the Lutheran Church. His theological interests drew him early in his ministry to the ecumenical movements happening there and later in the United States. As a leader of the Confessing Church, he rallied against the racist diatribes of National Socialism and the uncompromising cruelty of the Nazi regime, positions of honest dissent that would later cost him his life.

After serving German-speaking congregations in London from 1933 to 1935, where he came under the influence of Bishop Bell of Chichester and his Anglican religious community, he decided, against the advice of many friends, to return to

Germany before the outbreak of World War II to lead a preachers' seminary in Finkenwalde and to form a faith group, the House of the Brethren, in its environs.

In 1936, Dietrich was forbidden by the Nazis to teach. He went to the United States, where he accepted a lectureship, and stayed there until the war broke out in 1939. Beloved as he was by his friends and colleagues, he refused to accept a permanent teaching post, believing that it was his duty to return to Germany and suffer with his people. Only then, when the war was over, did he think he would have earned a right to take part in the rebuilding of his country.

Back in Germany he taught in an underground seminary; worked with associates in the intelligence services, who strove to find a way to overthrow Hitler; helped Jewish people to escape the country, and kept up a steady correspondence with friends on questions related to spiritual, theological, and ethical issues, notably the evils of racism and anti-Semitism.

In his most famous book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer echoed the conviction held by St. John of the Cross that believers in these midnight hours of suffering and betrayal are called by Christ not to compromise their belief but to obey the Lord,

not to pursue self-justification but to dive to new depths of discipleship.

As a witness (i.e. a martyr) and a true pastor of souls, Bonhoeffer exercised a powerful influence on contemporary Christian thought to the day he died at the hands of his Nazi captors. Excerpts from the letter he sent to Eberhard Bethge on July 21, 1944, revealed what faith meant to him. He wrote:

Dear Eberhard,

...*metanoia*...is how one becomes a man and a Christian. How can success make us arrogant, or failure lead us astray, when we share in God's sufferings through a life of this kind? I think you see what I mean, even though I put it so briefly. I'm glad to have been able to learn this, and I know I've been able to do so only along the road that I've traveled. So I'm grateful for the past and present, and content with them... (pp. 370-371).

Among his writings one poem stands out as a roadmap to the meaning of suffering. It is his masterpiece, "Stations on the Way to Freedom." The first is that of self-discipline by which our physical and rational powers need to become servants of our human spirit and instruments of the Holy Spirit, and so he declares:

If you set out to seek freedom, you must learn before all things
Mastery over sense and soul, lest your wayward desirings,
Lest your undisciplined members lead you now this way, now that way. Chaste be your mind and your body, and subject to you and obedient,
Serving solely to seek their appointed goal and objective.
None learns the secret of freedom save only by way of control.

The energy of a vigorous, well-functioning life spills naturally over into action. In this energetic period,

one strives to follow and make real one's ideals. The poet says we are caught in the "tempest of living." We hear God's command echoing throughout this second station and in soldierly fashion heed it.

Do and dare what is right, not swayed by the whim of the moment.

Briefly take hold of the real, not dallying now with what might be.

Not in the flight of ideas but only in action is freedom.

Make up your mind and come out into the tempest of living.

God's command is enough and your faith in Him to sustain you.

Then at last freedom will welcome your faith amid great rejoicing.

The vital years, those when we function to the full, soon give way to a turning point, a distinct transformation. Hands, once active and powerful, become in the third station withered and old. One ages, one suffers. Life slips out of one's control. Work ends, though the deeper meaning of one's commitments remains. Now the initiative belongs wholly to God, and it is to God that we must yield our freedom.

See what a transformation! These hands so active and powerful

Now are tied, and alone and fainting you see where your work ends.

Yet you are confident still, and gladly commit what is rightful

Into a stronger hand, and say that you are contented.

You were free for a moment of bliss, then you yielded your freedom

Into the hand of God, that He might perfect it in glory.

At last in the fourth station the curtain draws to a close. There is only one scene left to play: the final stage of death. So outstanding a man of faith is he that Bonhoeffer calls his death the "highest of feasts."

He leaves behind his ephemeral body and awaits the freedom of meeting God face to face.

Come now, highest of feasts on the way to freedom eternal.

Death, strike off the fetters, break down the walls that oppress us,

Our bedazzled soul and our ephemeral body,

That we may see at last the sight which here was not vouchsafed us.

Freedom, we sought you long in discipline, action, suffering.

Now as we die we see you and know you at last, face to face.

Bonhoeffer dared to proclaim that only through death does one learn the meaning of life. Only at this last station on the road of temporality will we experience the ultimate freedom and fulfillment for which our spirit has yearned.

St. John of the Cross is as sure as Dietrich Bonhoeffer that following Christ is the only way to understand the meaning of suffering in our personal and communal life. The Cross is the door to freedom. No prison could hold their spirits in bondage. No loss of earthly possessions, prestige, or power could deter them from pursuing true discipleship.

If the purgative way is a gift of grace given to us by God to disclose the poverty of our existence, and the illuminative way prepares us for still greater detachment from all that separates us from God, then the way of transforming union or unifying transformation draws us to the heart of the Triune God, who alone can satisfy our spiritual hunger.

In his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Dietrich saw that the first fruit of transforming union is to stand in readiness to hear the Master's call. All human hungers pale in comparison to a man's hunger for God. A true disciple, in Dietrich's words, is one who "has to forsake his old life" with its "relative security;" he has to leave it behind and surrender completely

to the "absolute insecurity" of fellowship with Jesus, who alone can lead the soul from incarceration through renunciation to liberation.

Union with the suffering heart of Jesus changes our life radically and entirely. That is why, for Dietrich, Christianity without the Cross remains an abstract idea rather than a living relationship so intense and wondrous that it becomes liberating and transforming to the highest degree. To become a mature disciple of the Master one must, according to Bonhoeffer, leave behind the security of one's comfort zone and seek fellowship with the Lord in an act of radical obedience.

One must see that this costly existence has a quality of its own since it leads us to where we would not go but to where God wants us to be. Before long, we begin to ask such life-changing questions as: "Is there some part of [my] life which [I am] refusing to surrender at [Christ's] behest, some sinful passion... some animosity...some [expectation], perhaps [my] ambition or [my] reason?" Do I live in the pretense that some part of my life is totally under my control? Do I drug myself so much by the comforts of cheap grace that I come, whether I know it or not, to the dead-end of discipleship?

Christian perfection for these witnesses is never our doing. It is a pure gift of grace, asking only that we embrace the Cross. As Bonhoeffer writes in *The Cost of Discipleship*:

The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest. Only a [person] thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, [one] has only got to pick it up; there is no need for [one] deliberately to run after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection. But each has a

different share: some God deems worthy of the highest form of suffering, and gives them the grace of martyrdom, while others he does not allow to be tempted above that [which] they are able to bear. But it is the one and the same cross in every case (p.103).

A SUFFERING MISFIT

How well these words apply to the prison experience of a young Frenchman, Jacques Fesch (1930-1957). In his self-analysis before his imprisonment, for a crime for which he would not be exonerated, Fesch described himself as a pleasant child whose affection for his mother could not counter his negative self-image of being weak and boastful, lazy and not much of a student, and of engaging in vandalism and throwing away the money given to him by his mother.

At the age of twenty Jacques married Pierrette who was pregnant with his child; they had a daughter named Veronica, but Jacques abandoned them. He looked for an easy way out of his trouble—to escape from France on a boat bound for Polynesia! He felt that this voyage to the other side of the world would be his salvation. Having failed in everything, having lived a decadent life, he allowed his escapist tendency to consume him. He returned briefly to his wife, looking for refuge, but he needed two million francs to buy the boat. His father refused his request, which only hardened his intention to escape. He obsessed over his plan. Preposterous as it was, it led to the crime for which he eventually paid with his life—robbery and killing a policeman.

Although Jacques had been educated in the Christian tradition, its influence had been effaced by his cruel and unpleasable father whom he blamed in great measure for his failures. In prison he had the chance to confront himself in complete silence and solitude. He was blessed with the help of the chaplain who lent him many spiritual books, his lawyer, Mr. Baudet, a sincere Christian who gave himself unsparingly to

his clients, and, his mother-in-law, who, though not a believer in God, never gave up her belief in Jacques. There he discovered that he could find his true self only by finding himself in God.

In isolation and anguish for the first eight months of his imprisonment, Jacques had little else to do but to read, reflect, and pray to be led out of darkness, to forget himself, and to surrender in love to God. As Jacques told Pierrette:

And then, at the end of my first year in prison [March, 1955], a powerful wave of emotion swept over me, causing deep and brutal suffering. Within the space of a few hours, I came into possession of faith, with absolute certainty. I believed and could no longer understand how I had ever not believed. Grace had come to me. A great joy flooded my soul, and above all, a deep peace. In a few instants everything had become clear. It was a very strong, sensible joy that I felt. I tend now to try, perhaps excessively to recapture it; actually, the essential thing is not emotion, but faith (p. 27).

Though at times he fell back into apathy and resignation, Jacques' conversion process continued. He repented for his selfish actions and yet rejoiced that God had forgiven him. He sensed Christ's presence in the poignancy of his solitude and he tried not to despair. He noticed that his periods of depression were less intense because there was a new power at work within him. Thanks to divine grace, the scales had fallen from his eyes and God alone had become the center of his world. Constrained as his body was by prison walls, his spirit soared free and he began to think mainly about how he could help other people—his father, his wife, his daughter, his beloved mother-in-law, his friends and supporters. When his strength failed him, he received Holy Communion and his courage returned.

At the age of twenty-seven Jacques was sentenced to death. He entered the midnight hour. He could now do nothing but believe in God, hope in heaven, and love to the end as Jesus did.

This is where the cross stands out in its bloody mystery. All life revolves about this wood...No escape, no more illusions. You know with certitude that what the world offers is as artificial and illusory as the ephemeral dream of a little six year old. You let yourself be invaded by despair, and you try to escape the grief that pursues and destroys you, seeking a way out that is nothing else than the rejection of the cross. There is no hope of peace or salvation outside of Christ crucified! Happy the one who understands this (p. 88).

The Cross became his only consolation. Though he could never be pardoned by the law, he turned in love to the Lord with this one thought: "That I might be able better to understand that what is and has been going on is purely an act of mercy on His part" (p. 110).

When Jacques was told that the date of his death would be September 30, 1957, he knew that this was the event God would use to effect his final transformation. He entered by anticipation into the joy of the elect: "I know that everything is a grace and that I am advancing not toward death but toward life" (p. 87). He realized that what Jesus wanted was the complete abandonment to God's will since, for most of his life, this was the blockage point that prevented grace from engulfing him entirely. Now he had no illusions left. He saw that the "seal of suffering" devastating as it was, was wholly redemptive.

Then came what Jacques considered to be the greatest grace of all: he recognized the Face of Christ in the faces of all those he loved. Being powerless himself, he found his strength in the Lord. He saw the spark of divinity in himself and all others.

At last, he passed over from unconsolable sadness to the city of joy. He had no desire to look backward, only forward. And yet, toward the end he was tested again, saying, "He plants a little flower of paradise in my soul, and then suddenly he takes everything away, and I find myself plunged into the darkness of abandonment" (p. 98). Even so, he experienced powerful thrusts toward the light. He waited patiently for the Lord to draw him to himself once more:

From day to day I ascend toward God, or rather, allowing his grace to act in me. I am being lifted up to that destined place from which I shall fly to paradise. I pray without ceasing, but of course during these periods of abandonment my prayer is less continual and many spontaneous acts of union are wanting to my days, so much so that I feel I am slipping a little. I assure you [his little brother] that I am aware of the degree of purification needed before one can be admitted to contemplation of the Lord! (p. 98).

Jacques knew that God in his goodness not only promised him an eternity of happiness, despite all his sins, but also that he carried Him there in his arms with all the gentleness and kindness of a father who loves his children. As the end approached, Jacques entered the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating as profusely as Jesus did, since, after all, death is death, but Christ was there at his side until the guillotine fell. His last words were: "I wait in the night and in peace...I wait for Love."

CONCLUSION

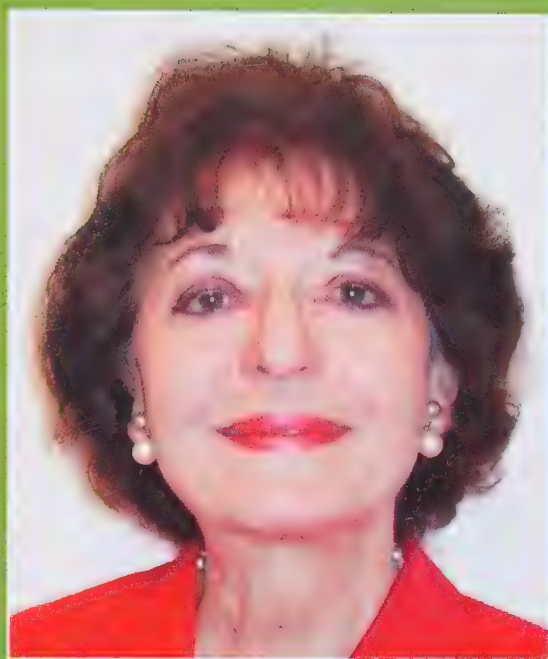
Jacques Fesch, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and St. John of the Cross all discovered the meaning of human suffering. The legacy they left us remains a consolation and a challenge: only when we place ourselves on the Cross with Jesus can we experience to the full—in body, mind, and spirit—the promise of salvation. Suffering's hidden blessing is the possibility of discovering true spiritual freedom.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Dr. Muto begins her essay by referring to Victor Frankl's discovery in the experience of the Holocaust: suffering can be endured if one has a reason to live. If we can find meaning in the suffering, we can accept it and even grow through the struggle. Can you recall a time you grew spiritually through a period of physical or psychological stress, darkness, pain or loss? Have you ever helped someone find meaning in their suffering? Did suffering together with another or with a group of people draw you closer to each other?
2. Would you say your suffering drew you closer to God?
3. Reflect on Bonhoeffer's four "stations" on the way to freedom and his journey of "letting go" in your own experience of personal suffering or sharing the suffering of another. Where are you right now with the daily existential suffering of life itself?

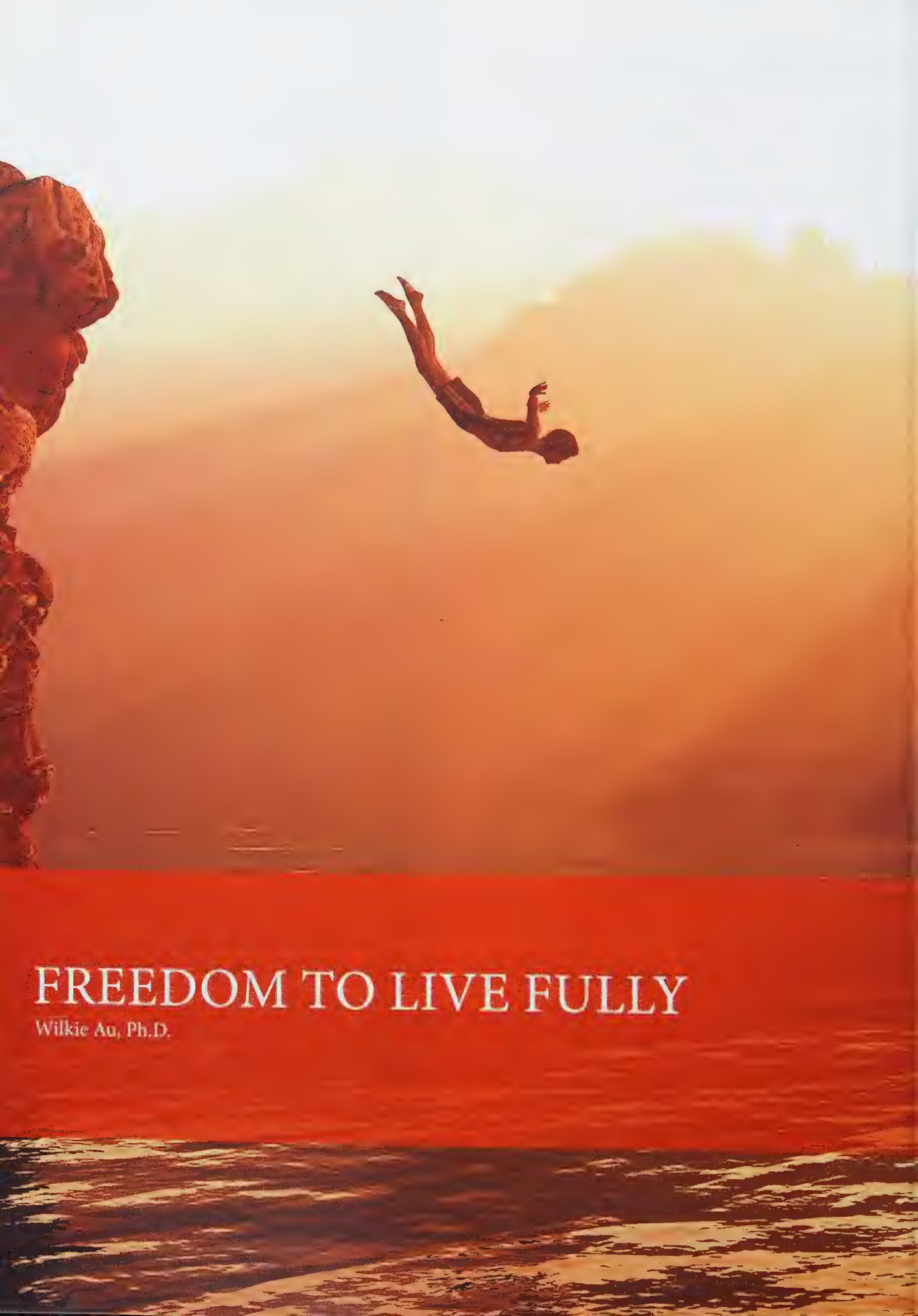
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FREEDOM TO LIVE FULLY

Wilkie Au, Ph.D.



In her book, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*, palliative care provider Bronnie Ware recounts the most common regrets of the dying. Her list includes two major regrets that highlight the critical role that personal freedom plays in living a satisfying life.

These two regrets are:

- 1) “I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.” Realizing that their life is almost over, many honestly admitted that they had not honored even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices that they had made, or failed to make.
- 2) “I wish that I had let myself be happier.” Remaining stuck in old patterns, many did not realize until the end that they could have made changes, that happiness is a choice.

In this article, my reflections on freedom are organized around these regrets.

THE STRUGGLE TO LIVE AN AUTHENTIC LIFE

Regarding the first regret, the dying lamented that they did not live the life that they wanted, but instead let their lives be shaped by the expectations and desires of others. To live one's life in an authentic way requires that we possess a clear sense of what we want in life. For this, we need to spend time in solitude. A fourth-grader, who chimed in on a conversation between his parents about the importance of solitude in living spiritually, once provided a concise description of solitude. "Is solitude like," he asked, "when I go to my room, close the door, sit on my bed and the outside noises like the banging of the pots in the kitchen get smaller and the inside noises get bigger?" Solitude is a way of quietly befriending the self, listening to the longings of one's heart and figuring out how to integrate these desires into our "one, wild, and precious life."

A life not rooted in our recurrent deep desires runs a high risk of being inauthentic and ultimately disappointing. Henry David Thoreau, who spent regular time alone at Walden Pond pondering the nature of a meaningful life, put it starkly: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not when it came time to die, discover that I had not lived." Solitude provides the free and friendly space for tuning into our hearts and discerning what desires we want to be definitional of who we are as persons and directional of our life. It is the place where we sort out our desires and where we are ourselves sorted out by the desires we choose.

SORTING OUT OUR DESIRES IN PRAYER

Solitude of heart is important for living with freedom, because it turns our glance inward and provides access to the valuable data stored within, such as our longings, aspirations and desires. Desires can be bewildering. When we look into our heart, we find such a jumbled mixture of desires, dreams, hopes, needs, fears, and yearnings. Some of our desires are compatible with one another; some are conflicting and mutually exclusive. We are also aware that these desires can affect our lives both positively and negatively. Some desires can enslave us and dissipate our energies; other desires have the capacity to generate power and energize our lives. This is why it is important to pray over our desires. Given the plethora of desires that compete for our approval and commitment, we must choose carefully if we want to live as a unified self, not torn apart by competing and divisive desires.

As we sit with our desires in prayer, we try to hear more clearly the groanings of our being wrapped up in various desires. Discernment, like panning for gold, is a way of sifting through the complex desires embedded in our hearts. The process involves retrieval, evaluation, and selection. We must first dredge up the raw desires of our hearts and accept everything that we have unearthed. Then we must closely examine all our desires and evaluate what is and what is not reflective of the treasure we seek. In order to separate treasure and dross, we need to distinguish among four affective states: the wishful, the instinctual, the tentative, and the definitive. For example, "I wish I would stop smoking," or "I wish I would win the lottery," are expressions of wishful desires. Instinctual desires are expressed by statements such as "I feel like eating," or "I feel like throwing this chair

out the window.” “I would like” expresses a tentative desire, something we are considering, but have not decided upon. “I want” gives expression to a definitive and clear desire.

Wishful Desires: “I wish” pertains to the realm of fairy tales and magic. Fanciful and unrealistic, such a desire relies on the appearance of a fairy godmother or a genie for its fulfillment. As long as wishes remain only wishes, they provide no bridge between themselves and reality.

Instinctual Desires: “I feel like” reflects those parts of ourselves where impulse, emotion and appetite hold sway. The value of being connected to our instinctual desires is that they provide us with data that is important for proper self-care and healthy choices. When we are disconnected from our instincts, we are cut off from the very root of our being.

Twelve-Step programs recognize the importance of being connected to basic human needs and instincts when recovering from addictive behavior. They suggest the use of the acronym “HALT” as an aid to proper self-care. “Halt” invites us to ask regularly: “Am I hungry, angry, lonely or tired?” Satisfying these basic needs fosters health and contributes to recovery because whenever we are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired, even our best resolutions and intentions go out the window. Weight loss and anger management programs also point out the role that basic need fulfillment plays in self-control.

“I feel like” can also be the wellspring of spontaneity and play, adding laughter and fun to life. Nevertheless, “I feel like” typically reflects the fleeting and transitory, and does not provide the stable ground for enduring emotional commitments. There is a vast difference between what we may feel like doing and what we want to do. “I feel like” resembles

“I wish” more than it does “I want.” “I want” contains a commitment that is missing in “I feel like.”

Tentative Desires: “I would like” shares much with “I want,” but is still tentative and unsure. The subjunctive mood of the grammatical expression itself indicates reservations, “ifs” and “buts.” “I would like” tells us that the matter is still under consideration. The final decision is up in the air and can go either way.

Definitive Desires: “I want” expresses a definitive and clear desire. Reflecting on our actual behaviors and choices is a concrete way to discover for ourselves what it is we really want, as opposed to what we wish, what we feel like, or what we would like. Real desires disclose themselves, not so much in our words, as in our actions, specifically in the way we allocate our money, resources, and time. More often than not, what we really want is embedded in what we do and do not do.

The experience of someone who struggled for twenty-five years to give up smoking illustrates well these four affective states and shows the power of “I want” to shape behavior. The “I would like” state comes across when he says, “I had known for a long time that it would be a sensible thing to do and, in that sense, I hoped for it.” However, his “I feel like” state kept change from happening: “The problem was that on another level I still found that the enjoyment of smoking outweighed my sense of abusing my body and therefore myself.” The break-through shift to “I want” came several years later when “during a period of sabbatical leave, I said, “I do not want to smoke. I positively desire to stop. I am going to stop.” And somewhat to his amazement, he did stop. Reflecting on his experience, he concludes, “that until giving up smoking moved from being a vague aspiration to touching the deeper level of myself where the power of desire could

be unleashed, nothing much happened. When it did touch that level, the focused strength of desire had the capacity to enable me to change behavior.” (Sheldrake, p. 14)

WHOLE-HEARTED WANTING

To freely determine the direction of our life, we must also distinguish between “simply wanting” something and “really wanting” it. When we “simply want” something, our wanting is often half-hearted and conflicted. We do not really want what we choose and may realize, even as we make the choice, that it is at odds with our other interests and desires. Consequently, we are inwardly divided and only half-hearted in our choice. The struggle for freedom is not that we do not have ample choices, but that we do not really want what we choose. When we “really want” something wholeheartedly, we are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve it. What we want has to be grasped not only in itself, but also in its connections with the rest of reality and what it portends for our life as a whole.

Librum arbitrium or free choice is our ability to choose whatever we desire, like the freedom we experience in a 31-flavor ice cream parlor. *Libertas* or liberty, on the other hand, is the capacity to live out our gifts and potential in a satisfying way. Abraham Maslow’s self-actualized persons, who thrived in living and excelled in their work, illustrate freedom as *libertas*. To get a sense of liberty, imagine a car built for power and speed crawling in freeway traffic stalled by a multiple car pile-up. Then,

imagine how it is able to open up and go full throttle when the roadway is finally cleared. To function fully with all our built-in capacity as individuals is to experience liberty. *Libertas* entails the wise and prudent use of our *librum arbitrium*. It requires that we discriminate among our desires and honor only those that contribute to our personal growth and development.

INORDINATE ATTACHMENTS DESTROY FREEDOM

Living an authentic life based on desires requires what Ignatius of Loyola describes as “indifference.” Ignatian indifference does not imply apathy or complacency as the English term “indifference” often connotes. Rather, it entails an inner freedom to honor or relinquish desires, depending on whether they serve or sabotage our living with wholeness and authenticity.

While Ignatius of Loyola taught that the world’s created goods were meant to be appreciated and enjoyed as gifts flowing from the hands of a generous and loving Creator, he, nevertheless, warned that these very same things can hijack our hearts and deter us from our destination. Our instinct for life naturally draws us to whatever seems to enhance our well-being. However, things go awry and work against us, when our orientation shifts from enhancing life to needing to control life. Describing this spiritually unhealthy shift, one spiritual writer says, “I don’t just want to enjoy the goodness of life. I want to own it, to store it

To freely determine the direction of our life, we must also distinguish between “simply wanting” something and “really wanting” it.

up, to expand it and manipulate it for my own purposes...Attachment is, in the first place, an indispensable capacity in the service of human life. But, unhappy fault, often unbeknownst to us it slips into the service of our selfishness and insecurity, and becomes control.” (Prevallet, p. 7-8) When our attachment to created things moves in this direction, it becomes “inordinate” or “disordered.” Inordinate attachments cast an addictive spell over us and become roadblocks to freedom.

LIVING A LIFE THAT IS OUR OWN

Living an authentic life based on freely chosen desires is not an easy task. According to British psychoanalyst R. D. Laing, our hearts are not free, but more like occupied territory. Others have invaded our hearts and installed their “shoulds.” These inhibiting “shoulds” spring from various sources: our superego (the internalized parental “oughts” from childhood); peer pressure; cultural and societal dictates; religious rules and expectations. Inhibiting “shoulds” may also arise from internal personal dynamics rooted in perfectionism. According to Neo-Freudian Karen Horney, children who experience severe emotional deprivation assume that their real self is not good enough to elicit the love they desire. To remedy this, they create an “idealized or glorified self” to substitute for their real self. Horney describes how this leads to the emergence of “the tyranny of the should.” They hold before their soul an image of perfection and unconsciously tell themselves: “Forget about this disgraceful creature you actually are; this is how you should be. These inner dictates are demanding and inexorable. Thus, she calls them “the tyranny of the should.”

THE TYRANNY OF THE SHOULD ROBS US OF FREEDOM

Whether the “shoulds” that diminish our freedom come from within us or from those in



our environment, awareness of their source is critically important. As the axiom of Gestalt Therapy puts it, “awareness leads to greater ‘response-ability,’ i.e. greater freedom to respond. The following is an exercise aimed at helping to understand the various inner demands that, if left unexamined, can diminish freedom.

Procedure

1. Make a list of the shoulds you are presently experiencing in your life. Make your statements brief and simple, expressing directly what you feel you ought to be doing and feeling without giving any reason or explanations. Give life to your pen. Be as spontaneous as possible, trying not to

filter or censor what automatically surfaces in your consciousness. Merely record what occurs at each moment. Continue to list these “I shoulds” for 10-15 minutes. Write down whatever comes to mind, even if it means repeating yourself.

2. Look over the list and put a plus (+) next to the statements about which you feel positive, an “x” next to those about which you feel negative, and a question mark (?) next to those about which you have ambivalent feelings.
3. Try to identify the source of the shoulds that stir up negative feelings by asking “Where is this should coming from?” Can you associate any of these negative shoulds with a face or voice? Are these shoulds being imposed from someone in the environment or do they originate in yourself? Perhaps they originally came from someone in the environment, but have since been internalized to such a degree that it would be truer to say that the source is within yourself.
4. Once the source of the negative should is identified, ask yourself how you want to respond to each at this time in our life. If the source is someone other than yourself, it could be someone close by, distant or dead (since death ends a life, not a relationship). Knowledge of the source will help you decide how you want to and can respond.

COMMENTS ON THE EXERCISE

This exercise can clarify for those driven or paralyzed by the tyrannical voices of inner shoulds where the battle for personal freedom is to be fought—with someone in the environment or within oneself. If the source of shoulds is actually oneself and being

projected onto others, it would be fruitless and destructive to look for a solution outside oneself.

This exercise also helps us recognize shoulds that elicit positive feelings. Perhaps it would be more proper to label these as “wants” rather than “shoulds.” Desires must be seriously respected if we are to live authentically. As Thomas Merton states, “we must be prepared to take responsibility for our desires and accept the consequences....Such real, genuine aspirations of the heart are sometimes very important indications of the will of God.” (Merton, p. 33)

Through this exercise, we can also examine those shoulds that stir up mixed feelings. By reflecting more concretely on our ambivalent reactions to these shoulds, we can gradually clarify our feelings and decide how we want to respond to them.

ARE YOU ROOTED OR STUCK?

Besides living lives that conformed more to other people’s desires and expectations than their own, the dying reported another major regret: not realizing until the end that happiness is a choice. Thinking that there was no alternative, they regretted staying stuck in toxic relationships, unhealthy work situations and destructive life-patterns. To be stuck is to be like the Samaritan woman at the well, who struggled with toxic shame due to her five failed marriages and her feeling of inferiority as a woman and a foreigner. No wonder she structured her life to avoid interpersonal interaction and went to the well at the hottest time of the day, when she knew no one else would be there. Living a dreary life of compromise and resignation, she felt hopeless that life could be different for her. To be stuck is to be like the fleeing Israelites who were tempted to lose faith in a God-promised





future and to turn back to the bondage of Egypt, where life was cramped and unfulfilling, though safe and familiar. Thoreau observed that the mass of people live lives of “quiet desperation” and unconscious despair, because they feel stuck with “the common mode of living” and “honestly think there is no choice left.”

Concretely speaking, we can find ourselves stuck in various ways during our life’s journey:

- Stuck when we let past failures, poor decisions, missed opportunities make us unforgiving of ourselves and cynical about life.
- Stuck when we hang on to resentment toward those who have wronged us, letting these resentments chain us to frustrating relationships.
- Stuck when we do not seek help for healing the poor images of the self rooted in childhood traumas that hamper our present lives.
- Stuck when we let envy of others consume us rather than gratefully acknowledging our own blessings and developing our own gifts.
- Stuck when pain and hurts from past intimate relationships keep us from being loving and vulnerable.
- Stuck when fear of failure prevents us from trying new things.
- Stuck when anger about past disappointments and losses shuts us off from reconciliation with a God who wants to be close to us.

To be rooted is to feel a confident adequacy in being an autonomous self, yet feeling a deep desire to share ourselves with others.

- Stuck when we despairingly stay in a miserable life situation because we cannot trust enough to opt for change.
- Stuck when we let fear rule our lives.

To live freely, periodically we need to ask ourselves: “Am I rooted or stuck?” To be rooted is to find ourselves at home with who we are, yet ever open to growth, to actualizing more of the potential contained in the rich mystery of our being. To be rooted is to feel a confident adequacy in being an autonomous self, yet feeling a deep desire to share ourselves with others in friendship and community. To be rooted is to be peaceful and productive, content and creative, intimate and generative. In short, to be rooted is to find that our lives bear rich fruit for ourselves and for others. A blossoming fruit-bearing tree is rooted; a root-bound plant is stuck.

THE WAY OUT: “BE STILL AND STILL MOVING”

Rehabilitation units in hospitals are sometimes called the Exodus unit. They are aptly named for the word “exodus” literally means “the way out” (from the Latin “ex” meaning “out of” and the Greek *hodos* meaning “the way”). The story of the Exodus contains the good news that we have a God who notices our bondage and intervenes in a way that sets us free. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the instrument of divine deliverance is Moses; today, God uses such people as family members, friends, and professionals to facilitate our release from

painful stuckness in life. In the case of those in recovery, addiction counselors, sponsors, and participants at meetings often embody the liberating presence of the God of the Exodus for us.

In the book of Exodus, juxtaposed verses in chapter 14 illustrate the twofold dynamic of liberation: “to be still and still moving.” On their desperate flight from captivity, Moses reassures the frightened Israelites, who feel the hot breath of the pursuing Egyptians on their backs and the wall of the sea blocking their path. He tells them that they need not fear; they just have to be still and let God do the fighting for them (Ex 14:14). Then, in the very next verse, God tells Moses to instruct the people to move on (Ex 14:15). God’s instruction to the Israelites applies to us as we seek escape from stuckness. To be still and still moving means, on one hand, letting our hearts be still and free from paralyzing anxiety and on the other hand, taking the next peaceful step in our path towards freedom.

LIBERATION TAKES “PATIENCE” AND IMAGINATION

Being “patient” and utilizing our imagination are doorways to freedom from stuckness. The Chinese word for “patience” contains two elements: a knife poised on top of the heart. Unlike the English word, which often connotes complacency and apathy, the Chinese notion of patience involves a commitment to be still in the midst of a painful situation, until we know how the knife is painfully poised over the heart, i.e., until we know what in our life

is going against the grain and causing pain. Instead of mindlessly flailing about in order to derive a quick fix, observing our perplexity with patience enables us to see the underlying cause of our pain and enables us to intervene in an appropriate and targeted way.

IMAGINATION AS A DOORWAY TO FREEDOM

When an attitude of “that’s the way things are” dominates our consciousness, we can find ourselves stuck in painful and unsatisfying situations—feeling like the dying who did not realize that happiness is a choice. Apathy results from feeling that nothing in our situation can be changed and that we have no choice but to bear the suffering. Unable to conceive of how things can be other than they are, an impoverished imagination leaves us stranded and stuck. Only a lively imagination can lift us from such paralysis by suggesting how things can be different.

Our sufferings in themselves cannot motivate us to act. It is only when our imagination helps us to realize that things could be otherwise and that our sufferings are not inevitable, that a dramatic shift in consciousness occurs; the suffering that we once thought to be bearable now becomes unbearable. Unbearable suffering supplies the commitments and motive for change. In short, we can break through our apathetic resignation to unhappy situations only when we use our imagination to help us:

- 1) envision how things can be different, 2)

value the possibilities that we perceive, and 3) convert our perceptions into personal projects for change.

CONCLUSION

Psychiatrist Irvin Yalom counsels his patients who struggle over past regrets to imagine themselves five years ahead and to notice what regrets they might have at that time. Then he encourages them to live their present lives in a way to reduce those future regrets. Clarity about our desires can motivate us to do something about fulfilling them and thereby prevent future regrets. “Freedom for” and “freedom from” make up the two-sided coin of personal freedom. “Freedom for” empowers us to pursue our recurrent deep desires in life and “freedom from” enables us to resist whatever hinders the free pursuit of these desires.

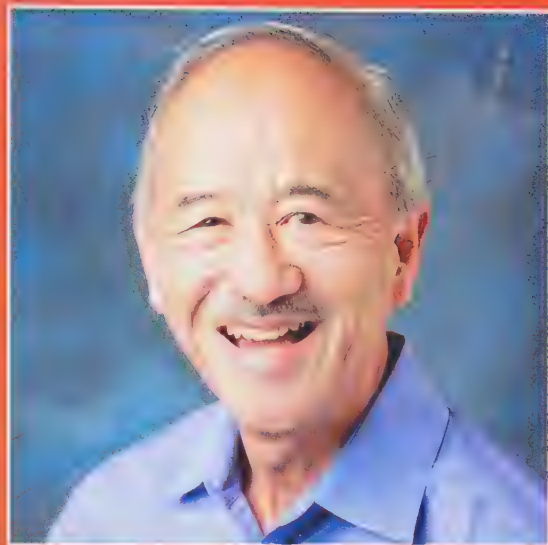
RESOURCES

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We can break through our apathetic resignation to unhappy situations only when we use our imagination to help us.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Dr. Wilkie Au focuses on two regrets that dying people have often articulated: not having pursued their deepest dreams and remaining “stuck” in old patterns. As you review your own life journey, where might you be “stuck” in certain patterns of thinking, of acting, patterns preventing you from becoming your truest, deepest self? Do you want to change? Are the risks and challenges worth the opportunities and possible new freedom?
2. The author suggests that in the process of discernment and sorting out our desires, there are four affective states: wishful desires, instinctual desires, tentative desires and definitive desires; it takes a concerted effort over a period of time to reach the point where we say with all our heart “I want.” How and when have you reached the point when you were able to say about a particular goal “I want” without qualification? (for example, vocational discernment, relationship commitments, changes of employment or letting go of addictive behavior)
3. Dr. Au suggests that true freedom comes from learning to balance “being still” and “still moving” – that is, being rooted without being stuck, and having enough imagination to break through apathetic resignation to unhappy situations. Ultimately, it will be “freedom for” – the choice of a positive good which will give us the necessary “push” to free ourselves from unhealthy, unnecessary attractions and dependencies. How has that process played out in your life choices both large and small, daily and long term?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wilkie Au, Ph.D., is a spiritual director and Professor emeritus of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University, where he taught in the area of Christian spirituality and coordinated the graduate concentration in spiritual direction.

His *By Way of the Heart: Toward a Holistic Christian Spirituality* won the 1990 Book Award of the College Theology Society and his *Enduring Heart: Spirituality for the Long Haul* won an award from the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada in 2001. With his wife, Dr. Noreen Cannon Au, a Jungian analyst in private practice, he has co-authored four books: *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration*, *The Grateful Heart: Living the Christian Message*, *God's Unconditional Love: Healing Our Shame*, and *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path*, which was named best book on pastoral ministry by the Catholic Press Association in 2007. Their books have been translated into Spanish, Polish, Chinese, and Korean, and re-published in Great Britain, India, and the Philippines. In 2012, they were awarded the Writer's Award in Spirituality by the Loyola Institute for Spirituality.

Former Associate Editor of *Human Development*, Dr. Au has published widely in such journals as *The Way* (a review of Christian spirituality published by the British Jesuits), *Studies in Jesuit Spirituality* and *Studies in Formative Spirituality*. He presently serves on the editorial review panel of *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International*.



PILGRIMAGE INTO FREEDOM

St. Jane Khin Zaw



Pilgrimage is a good word for the journey of a human life. It implies that it has a direction, one which is primarily spiritual, since human beings are intrinsically spiritual. And 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom'. (2 Cor 3:17) Pope John Paul II spells this out for us: 'By the outpouring of his Spirit, the risen Jesus creates the vital space where human freedom can be fully realized.' (General Audience, 2 September 1998)

BEGINNINGS IN BURMA

Lives can be long or short, and now that I am 80 mine looks like a long one. My journey has also covered a lot of ground, of great variety, both geographically: from Burma via India to England and finally Scotland, not to mention the cross-cultural experiences of all those moves. Born in Rangoon in 1936, I was the middle of three sisters. My mother was half English, half Burmese. At Rangoon University, she met my father, U Khin Zaw, and they were married in Rangoon in 1933. As University Librarian, Burmese Music and Culture became his field of research.

We were born into a cultural mixture of Burmese songs, stories and plays, and the Buddhist silent meditation my father practiced. At the same time, our home had a Christian atmosphere; my mother loved singing English hymns as she did the housework. Although she did not go to Church, she lived the Christian virtues, instilling them in us by word and example. Our Buddhist father and Anglican mother decided to leave us free to choose our own religion/life-philosophy as we would come of age. I am glad they did. I delight that God allowed me the unique experience of being discovered by Him, realizing He had been hidden – but present - in my life from the very beginning.

The Japanese army invaded Burma in 1942. The Allies realized there was no hope of defending Rangoon so the Burma Army evacuated it but only after first destroying the port and blowing up the oil terminal, till the whole city was in flames. My grandparents, and an aunt along with my mother and the three of us, were lucky enough to catch the last plane out of Burma. I remember having to sit on the floor as it was an army plane, first to Chittagong, then three days in the train to Calcutta, India. Meanwhile our father, Lt. Khin Zaw, ran the news service for Burma out of Delhi, India. My mother and the rest of us joined him there in 1943 to edit the news. After the war he returned to Burma.

Perhaps I may seem to have digressed but it seems to me that each member of our family is fundamentally part of ourselves; every person is a “person-in-relationship.” And of course, the whole human family is a network of relationships in mutual influence, weakening or strengthening our character, all converging in Teilhard’s Omega point, Christ drawing all things into himself.

TO ENGLAND AND DISCOVERY OF CHRIST

After the war, we went back to England. Having

settled in Wimbledon, we were sent to nearby grammar schools. When the time came for the three of us to move on to University, we all had scholarships. However the scholarship provided only for our classes. Since my parents could not afford to give us necessary assistance, they sold their house in Wimbledon and moved to a much smaller London flat. I never cease to be inspired by their self-sacrificing love for us!

For a term or two at Somerville College, Oxford, I had Elizabeth Anscombe, a committed Catholic, as tutor. She handed my first essay back to me saying, ‘Your thinking is very muddled.’ That put me in my place! If a brilliant mind like hers could believe in God, it must not be against reason. While still an undergraduate with no religious faith, a desire for faith was growing imperceptibly within me.

I had been writing essays summarily dismissing the classical proofs of the existence of God. And yet, there were three spiritual values that could not exist without God: love, truth and beauty. Once I remember looking into a lake and saying with the utmost urgency ‘Oh God, make me believe in you!’ Not long after that another prayer came involuntarily out of me, looking at a poster of a stained glass window in Chartres Cathedral, the Blue Madonna, with a silent plea for help. From that moment (if not long before) Mary took my whole life into her hands. I came across Blessed Grignion de Montfort’s True Devotion to Mary in a wayside shrine in France where I consecrated myself to her, as indeed we do daily as a community in Carmel.

THE GIFT OF PRAYER

At Somerville, I used to go regularly to daily Mass with Father Michael Hollings at the Chaplaincy. I had no idea what was going on at the altar, but I sensed that it was something of enormous import. When the Mass was over, I felt a compelling silence within and around me. I realize now that it must have been

the gift of prayer being given to me, without my having even made any effort to pray. Contemplation, as such, is always a gift, helping us to pray but not automatically part of our prayer. Even vocal prayer can tend to contemplation. St. Teresa of Avila 'found in the Our Father not only a model for vocal prayer, but a foundation for the highest mystical prayer as well'. (Fr. Gabriel Barry OCD)

Our Carmelite Constitutions take this contemplative vocation for granted from the beginning:

'True to the ideal of Our Holy Mother, the Discalced Carmelite nuns live their contemplative ecclesial life in an atmosphere which integrates, on the one hand, solitude and silence, with a sisterly communion of life, on the other.'

Now, as I grow older, I find it hard to believe I ever really pray, except perhaps momentarily. St. Therese, whose *Story of a Soul* did as much for me as St. Teresa's *Life*, describes her own prayer in terms I could make my own:

Prayer is, for me, an outburst from the heart; it is a simple glance darted upwards to Heaven; it is a cry of gratitude and of love in the midst of trial as in the midst of joy! In a word, it is something exalted, supernatural, which dilates the soul and unites it to God. Sometimes when I find myself, spiritually, in dryness so great that I cannot produce a single good thought, I recite very slowly a Pater or an Ave Maria; these prayers alone console me, they suffice, they nourish my soul.

I pray the rosary every day, meditating on the mysteries with the prayers going on as an undercurrent. Any extended time of prayer however, silent prayer or the Divine Office, is usually a struggle to keep awake. One thing I am absolutely certain of is that God goes on loving me infinitely and compassionately. So I try to remain in His presence, with my heart open and attentive, trying to return love for love. Simone Weil says:



Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. (Gravity and Grace)

We can also remember that the main issue is not our search for God, but God's desire for, and pursuit of us. To pray, then, is to step trustingly into that relationship as the foundation of our lives. In the end, as St. Paul reminds us,

'the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.' (Romans 8:26 NRSV)



Fr. Michael lent me various books including Romano Guardini's *The Lord*, which I loved. Meanwhile I had been reading Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* and *The Grammar of Assent*. These helped me a lot. Through Newman I came to understand that it is not the doctrine we believe in but the reality to which each doctrine points, or better yet, to the person of Jesus Christ. I had been a bit overawed by all the Catholic doctrines and dogmas I would have to believe in – thinking I'd have to assess and accept them one by one. But one day I realized that no, they would all fit together! The whole of Christian doctrine suddenly lit up for me then, like some vast landscape coming into perfect focus. After that I devoured all the doctrine I could get hold of.

As it was my last term at Oxford, Fr. Michael suggested I ask Fr. Ronald Moffat SJ for instruction, since he was living near my home in London. Fr. Ronald questioned me about how much of the faith I already knew. All I needed for Baptism was to be able to make the Profession of Faith: the Apostles' Creed. We settled on a day before Mass at St. James, Spanish Place, where he was supplying at the time. The gospel for the day was the parable of the ten lepers. My sister Rosemary and her Catholic husband Gerald came too. Gerald was my godfather, and Bridget my niece godmother. Receiving Holy Communion for the first time was deeply moving for me. I went to Mass every day from then on. I still saw Fr. Ron from time to time until he moved elsewhere.

My vocation came to me along with my faith. If God existed, GOD, in unfathomable depths of infinity, it seemed obvious to me that I should give my life completely to him. I came across a beautiful Medieval Latin lyric by Paulinus of Nola, translated by Helen Waddell.

*My Life hung on the wood
So that my whole life should stand in God.
What return shall I make for your life, Christ, my Life?*

I thought that contemplative religious, with their life of prayer in silence and solitude, would best put this complete giving into practice, and I was already drawn to the Carmelites. Fr. Ronald suggested I write to the Prioress at Upholland Carmel in Lancashire. By then I knew I would have to tell my mother about it. She had already been dreading the prospect of me becoming a cloistered nun. But at my Profession she saw how radiantly happy I was. At the same time my father had picked up St. Therese's Story of a Soul in a Rangoon bookshop and felt that her life was very much similar to his own Buddhist life and prayer; he recognized the authenticity of Therese's consecrated life and was very happy that I was sharing it. Later he sent me a booklet of the Sunlun Way of Mindfulness he practiced.

The Prioress at Upholland asked me why I wanted to enter. I knew quite well - to know and love Jesus more - but I could not get it out. When the ecclesiastical superior saw me he said that I might be full of desire for Carmel now, but what if after my Profession I were to decide I did not want it after all. 'How could I possibly do that?' I said, 'It is not just for myself I want it. Think of all the thousands of people the world over who were needing and counting on my prayers!' However I cannot truthfully say I always lived up to this universal concern for people everywhere. To quote Pope Francis on the globalisation of indifference -

'We end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own.'

I spent 33 very happy years there in Lancashire in my first Carmel. As a novice, while painting cards for sale I learned St. John's Gospel by heart. Our devoted Chaplain for many years had been Fr. Thomas Worden, Scripture scholar and author of *The Psalms are Christian Prayer*. (Sheed and Ward, 1961). This gave me the incentive to pray often with the Scriptures.

My mother's health was failing. She could no longer come to Lancashire to see me. I began to wonder if I ought to ask to transfer her to Golders Green. I had asked Fr. Kevin Kelly, a moral theologian at the College, for direction. Suddenly without any reflection I found myself saying, with great urgency, 'But, Kevin, if I don't go, I'll have stopped listening to the Spirit!' That settled it for us both. I was with my mother the day she died a few months after I had transferred.

A few years later, the Golders Green community had become too few in number to remain in their large house. That was when I moved to Dysart Carmel in Scotland where I am now permanently at home.

The Discalced Carmelite charism, defining our spiritual identity, was first embodied in St. Teresa of Avila, being formed from her religious life experience as she grew and developed in relationship with God: Wishing to respond radically to the Gospel invitation: As the Father has loved me so I have loved you. *Abide in my love* (John 15:9) We have chosen to follow Jesus in His contemplative rather than His active apostolate. In the midst of very ordinary daily lives in common we are sent out on a spiritual mission that draws us to remain in his love, our hearts focused in simple attention on the Mystery at the core of our being and in the depths

of every human person, drawing together the whole cosmos in mutual interdependence.

In this life of prayer, which Teresa describes as a continuing heartfelt exchange of friendship with Him who we know loves us, we reach out to the God whose grace is offered to everyone in the gift of His incarnate Son. Our sharing in His prayer becomes a reality above all in the daily Liturgy, where it is Christ's own Spirit who prays in us and empowers us to offer our lives in union with His total self-gift for the sake of the world, as He passes through death to life in the paschal mystery celebrated in each day's Eucharist. As Sisters in solidarity with all humanity in a broken world we stumble and falter in the give and take of relationships and persevere in forgiveness and trust according to Christ's new commandment – *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."* (John 13:34)

Continually praying in the darkness of faith, we identify with the cries of the powerless and the anguish of the oppressed, always with confident hope in Love's creative power to restore within us their Trinitarian communion. Our lives of prayer are joyfully lived out in a small family of mutual love and service that tries to give clear witness to the value of gospel communion in a divided world. We witness to God as the only absolute by the totality of our self-giving.

By our vows of chastity, poverty and obedience we free ourselves in order that our love may reach out to everyone in the world. The contemplative spirit of Carmel draws its inspiration from Mary, the first Christian disciple and Mother of Jesus, Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She pondered all these things in her heart and heard the Word of God and lived by it. She accompanies us on our spiritual journey in her silent listening, her complete surrender and her concern that all should know the fullness of life in her Son, Jesus Christ.

Today in Dysart we have a full house of 25 Sisters. There have been, throughout both good and bad times, many blessings and much fun and laughter, with overflowing grace which certainly accounts for the deep harmony among us all, in spite of our various differences. The Sisters are sensitive to each other's vulnerability, and a loving concern marks our community.

READY FOR THE NEXT BIRTH

I can testify with deep gratitude that my own pilgrimage has hopefully been marked in me by a growth in freedom, until now, at 80, I am beginning to feel free enough to welcome death, that going home to God which we shall all discover is far more a birth to an infinitely greater Life than a death. I have been talking about myself here far more than is good for me, so I thankfully close my long monologue with another Hopkins poem that expresses my joy and thanksgiving that God has chosen me to be myself and no other, for that self can only be Christ's own Self, embodied in a tiny unit of his Mystical Body, in deep and total communion with all the other members of Teilhard's Cosmic Christ.

As Kingfishers Catch Fire

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;

As tumbled over rim in roundy wells

Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's

Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;

Selves — goes itself; myself it speaks and spells, Crying
Whát I dó is me: for that I came.

I say móre: the just man justices;

Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;

Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —

Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,

Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his

To the Father through the features of men's faces.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. For all of us, life is a journey, a process of movement from the familiar and comfortable into new challenges and uncharted waters. With a spirit of openness and adventure, Sr. Jane moved many times half-way around the world. She is still moving deeper and deeper into the mystery of the Cosmic Christ. As you read her story, could you identify with certain aspects of her search and discovery?
2. One of the special moments early in her conversion process was an experience of silent awareness and peace at prayer, even before she knew how to pray. Have you ever felt such a sense of being totally surrounded by God?
3. Sr. Jane has found freedom in accepting her chronological age as yet another call to deeper spiritual freedom. She speaks of folding into the Cosmic Christ, grateful for every aspect of the small self she is, recognizing that she is being consecrated into Christ's self. What does dying and rising into the cosmic Christ mean for you?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a Carmelite Sister going on 80. I love poetry. I even tried writing it myself on and off. Inspired by nature mostly, from the mystery brimming in each curled leaf or singing bird to the view of the Himalayas from the foothills, where I went to school.


I have also enjoyed painting, a bit of iconography but more often watercolour, especially seascapes. Wendy, an Anglican spiritual director I met at Tymawr, told me she saw the Spirit in me, which gave me lasting self-confidence. With joy and gratitude I am constantly trying to discover and tune in to the unique vocation he calls me to, and above all to appropriate our deepest identity as one body in Christ.



DYING TO LIVE

STORIES OF IMMIGRANTS

Jim Callahan



I write this article having just returned from an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, with a young man in his late thirties originally from Guatemala. He is a husband, father, brother and a friend and he's lived in this country for almost 26 years - working hard, owning a home, paying taxes, and educating his children. He is an active and respected leader within his parish community. He came to this country fleeing the violence and the civil unrest that had plagued Guatemala for years. At sixteen he entered the United States as a political asylee.

Throughout the next ten years he fought for the right to stay in the United States one court appearance after another, until a determination was made that he had to leave the United States because a peace accord had been signed.

At that time, he was married with four children. He decided to remain in this country and for the next few years he lived with his family in the shadows.

Four years ago when stopped for a minor traffic violation, his name was run through the system and he was turned over to ICE. Since then he has reported faithfully to immigration as mandated and was told at his previous meeting that he would be deported.

On the way to the ICE office earlier today he said, "I prayed this morning for everyone who has helped me. I am so grateful to God for all the people who have reached out to me and my family. I am crying not tears of sorrow but tears of joy for the many blessings my family and I have received."

Faith and gratitude are the foundation of an immigrant's life, and they have taught us much, as Scripture says, "In everything, give thanks." One thing is certain: when we reach heaven there will be no need for papers. If we only realized we are all immigrants passing through this world.

ANGELIQUE'S STORY

On an overcast Saturday morning, the American 747 plane gently glided into the gate at Kigali International Airport in Rwanda, five miles from City Center, and boarding the plane was a solitary passenger.

Angelique Mutubba, dressed in traditional Rwandan clothing, limped down the center aisle of the aircraft, dragging behind her a duffle bag with the words "Property of the United Nations Peace Keeping Forces" printed on its side.

The attendant showed Angelique to her seat and helped her lift her bag into the overhead compartment. As she settled into her spot she closed her eyes clutching a cross her mother gave her and

prayed a silent prayer: Please be with me and help me to heal.

As the plane taxied down the runway, Angelique looked out the window and continued to stare as the plane gently began to ascend into the heavens. She leaned closer to the window to see the ground below her. She saw the elementary school she had attended – once alive and vibrant with the laughter of children – now in silent mourning. The building was totally destroyed. Students' desks and blackboards were thrown into a heap, crushed by cinder blocks; the ground stained in blood.

As the plane continued its ascent she saw the place, where once stood a hospital, totally littered with wheel chairs, surgical tables, and all types of debris. Just to the left she glanced down at the market place she once so loved as a child. This was the market where friends and neighbors would congregate every Saturday morning, coming in from the countryside with their wares and produce to sell – sharing gossip and telling news of family and friends. Once a community alive and vibrant with noise and laughter, it now held only silent screams.

A few days before Christmas in 1996, I received a call from Boston's Catholic Charities Director of Refugee Resettlement. She asked me if I would house a refugee who was arriving into Boston and would fly out to California on January 2nd. I was managing a home for African Refugees who were seeking political asylum, and she felt it would be much better for her if she were surrounded by people who would understand.

On the day appointed, I drove to the airport, found the terminal her plane was landing in, and waited

One thing is certain: when we reach heaven there will be no need for papers.
If we only realized we are all immigrants passing through this world.

outside of international flights and customs. Most of the passengers had disembarked and had cleared customs and still no one fit her description. I looked up the hallway and from a distance I saw an elderly woman limping toward me, dragging something behind her. I approached her and realized to my amazement she was a woman in her thirties dragging a duffle bag. I introduced myself and welcomed her to the United States. I have never seen so much pain and suffering reflected in a person's eyes and to my surprise she spoke in perfect English to thank me for picking her up.

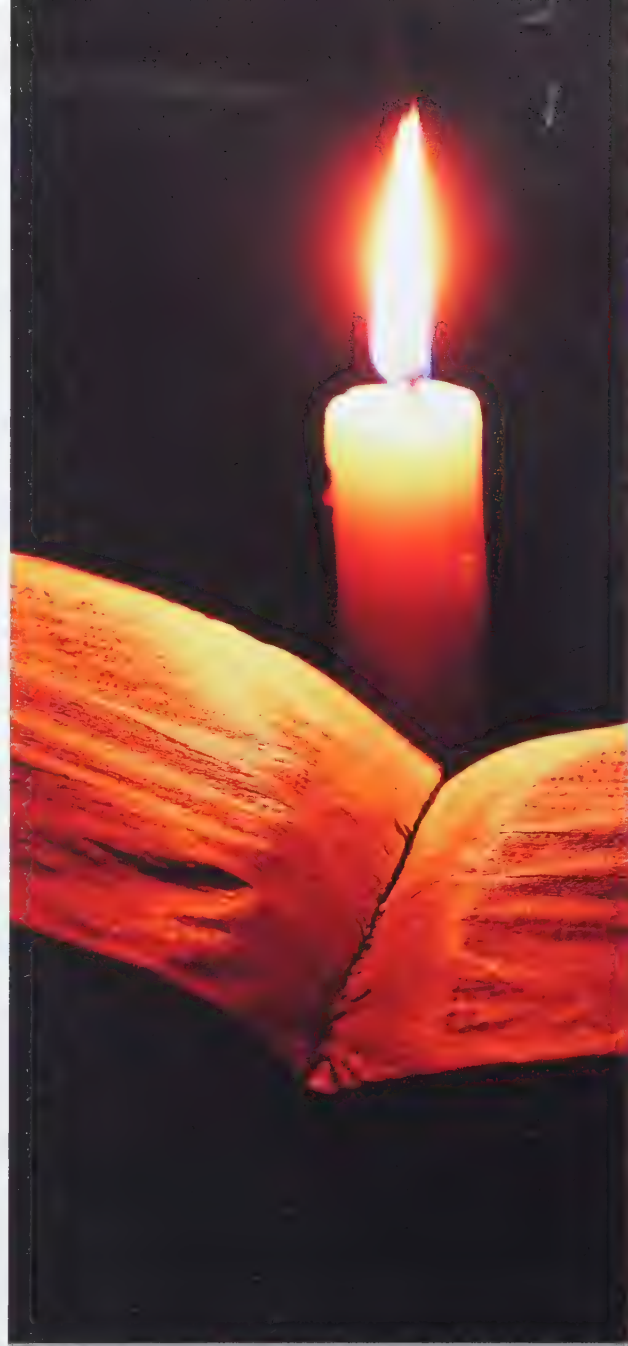
Over the years working with immigrants, refugees, and migrants I discovered that every person has their own timeline for sharing their story. You need to be patient and allow them to share when they are ready. Sometimes it's hours; sometimes years.

As we got to the car and headed out of the airport, Angelique began to open up and told me this was not her first time in the United States.

"I was born in Kigali," she began, "but my mother's family came from Butare, a city three hours from Kigali. My father was born in Belgium and worked at the Belgium Embassy. Every day he would walk through the market to go home. Meandering through the market he met my mother. She was then living in Kigali and sold charcoal and Kerosene. My mother only had an elementary school education but my father graduated from the Sorbonne in Paris, France. After a year they married."

"Faith was important to both of them," she continued. "Every morning they attended Mass and prayed God would bless them with a child. Four years after their wedding I was born. When I got older, my mother told me she had prayed to Our Lady of Lourdes and had promised her if she had a daughter, she would name her Maria Angelique Bernadette."

"My childhood was wonderful. When I reached school age, my parents sent me to a Catholic School.



I loved school, but I had a passion for music and dance. Upon completion of primary school, my parents decided to send me to a Catholic boarding school in France. My father wanted me to have a classical education. I remember I was excited and terrified. I had never been outside of Rwanda and the thought of leaving my parents filled me with sadness. Little did I know I was being prepared for the future."

Angelique excelled in school, and on the holidays she returned to Rwanda. Then, back in France, she continued her studies and had the opportunity to



study ballet. Ballet had become her passion and she concentrated all her efforts to excel. She enrolled at the Opera National de Paris. After two years of study with the National Ballet Company, she joined the traveling company and traveled throughout the world. Her world kept expanding as she toured with the Ballet troupe, when in her third year tragedy struck.

Angelique received word that her father died suddenly. She flew back to Kigali to be with her mother. The political situation was already volatile in Rwanda, and then chaos erupted. The plane carrying the President of Rwanda was shot down as it was making a landing at the Kigali International Airport.

Within days, the genocide commenced and in a three-month span almost one million Tutsi's were killed. As the blood of the Tutsi people flowed in the streets, Angelique contacted a friend who would smuggle her and her mother out of Rwanda. Traveling by night and sleeping by day, she finally arrived on the Democratic Republic of Congo side of Lake Kivu.

Soon she found herself living with her mother in a refugee camp along with one thousand other refugees. She and her mother shared a tarp to protect them from the rain. As she stared out of the tarp she reflected on her life in Europe. So different was her life in the camp with inadequate housing, no medical assistance and very little food. They were

barely surviving. Cholera broke out and her mother succumbed to the disease.

When her mother died Angelique felt totally alone. One night as she wept she heard a voice. "Can I help you?" She recognized the voice, looked up and saw Jean Claude with whom she had gone to elementary school.

Over the course of the next few months Jean Claude became her constant companion. In January 1995 he asked her to marry him. The wedding took place in the make-shift chapel that had been erected in the refugee camp. Attending the wedding were strangers who shared the common bond of loss and loneliness, but together they celebrated the love and joy between Angelique and Jean Claude.

A year of marriage had passed and they had a child they named Andre, after her father. Rumors of political stability had reached the camp, but people were terrified to return to the city. Though scared, they felt it was time to leave the camp and return to a place they once called home.

To be safe they traveled under the cover of darkness and slept during the day. After one month of walking they arrived in the outskirts of Kigali. They slowly made their way into the city. Jean Claude carried Andre in his arms as Angelique walked a few steps behind him. They could see the packed road up ahead. A truck approached from behind, so they

stepped to the side of the road. Suddenly there was an explosion and then darkness.

Angelique woke up and surveyed the room with her eyes. Panic set in and she felt a sense of dread go through her body. Just then a nurse appeared at her bedside. In a voice filled with fear she asked, "Where am I?" The nurse responded, "At the hospital in Kigali."

"Where are my husband and son?" she asked.

As gently as possible, the nurse replied, "With God."

Through her screams she heard the nurse say land mines and realized what had happened. She threw off the sheets and tried to jump out of bed. The nurse grabbed her but when Angelique looked down she saw part of her leg was missing and the remaining part was wrapped in a bandage.

Six months later Angelique was brought back to the refugee camp and waited with hundreds of others for her refugee papers to be processed. She finally received refugee status and was given asylum in the United States.

We approached the entrance to the home for African Refugees, parked the car and saw some of the other residents look out the window at the newest arrival. By the time we reached the door to the house, all the residents had gathered to greet her with a traditional song of welcome sung in Kinyarwanda. Five of our residents were also survivors of the genocide.

After a light meal, Angelique was shown to her room and invited to Mass that would be celebrated in our chapel at 6 p.m. As we gathered in the chapel, Mass began. After communion one of the Rwandan residents stood up and faced the community and said, "At this time we would like to sing a song of praise to God."

The drums began and the voices broke into harmony as the community sang the Magnificat. There was a commotion in the corner of the chapel and I watched Angelique trying to balance herself with her

prosthetic leg. She slowly began to move, swaying back and forth. As she began to sway her arms to the music, it was hard to believe she was once a ballet dancer. It wasn't graceful or beautiful but her dance was mesmerizing. Her face glowed with joy as tears streamed down her cheeks. When the prayer ended she whispered "Amen" and she made her way back to her chair.

When the Mass concluded, I spoke to her outside the chapel and asked her why she felt compelled to dance. With a slight smile she said, "I had to. You see, many years ago, God gave me the gift of dance and I had to give back to him the gift I received in thanksgiving. I also danced in thanksgiving to God for giving me parents who loved me, a husband and a child who filled me with joy. Even though I miss them, I am grateful to God for having them as part of my life even for a short time. I am grateful because they helped make me who I am today."

TRAIL OF TEARS

A few years ago, I was working in Los Angeles, California, and became involved with an organization called Sanctuary. It had homes on both sides of the border that gave shelter to people who were getting ready to cross the border or had already crossed.

One evening I was at one of the houses and there was a knock on the door. Ten immigrants arrived at the house; pilgrims who shared a dream of starting a new life in the States. It had been a difficult journey as they made their way through the desert in temperatures higher than 100 degrees in the shade. Dehydration, venomous snakes, and scorpions were some of the issues they faced as they traveled through the darkness. Many people refer to their journey as a "Trail of Tears." That trail has taken the lives of thousands of immigrants – an estimated 600 a year since 1994.

Why were they willing to leave their homeland to make such a journey? When asked, some responded they had a sick relative who needed medication.

Others said they could not find work and if they did, the job paid very little. They could barely survive at home. Some said that looking into the eyes of their children who pleaded for food was heart-breaking, and they knew they had to do something.

Immigrants, migrants, and refugees all confirm, "We are migrating not because we want to, but because we have to." The United Nations High Commission of Refugees has estimated there are more than 200 million people migrating around the world:

- 30-40 million are undocumented
- 24 million are internally displaced
- 10 million are refugees.

One common denominator exists, whether Mexican, Syrian, Rwandan, Irish or any other nationality, and that is the experience of dehumanization. Many people feel the effects of racism, discrimination, and prejudice as they try to survive in a country where they hoped their dreams would be fulfilled.

When I first arrived at my present parish, I was surprised to find 64 nationalities in a city of about 13,000 people; the three largest being Central American, Asian, and African. Meeting with leaders of the various ethnic communities, I asked, "What is the biggest issue you face living in the community?" They responded, "Medical care." Many members of the community were fearful of going to the doctor because of their legal status. Many felt they were treated with disrespect and were afraid to sign their names on a document most could not even read, much less understand.

I asked a physician friend from Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN if he would come and see some of the people. For two days he treated 30 patients. Some were newly arrived immigrants with several blisters on their feet from their journey through the Sonoran Desert. Others suffered from dehydration, malnutrition and other serious illnesses. He talked to some of his colleagues and the dream of a clinic was born. It was named Our Lady of Guadalupe Free Clinic (OLGFC).

In the six years since the clinic was founded, we have been able to assist almost 1,000 patients. Our volunteer practitioners come from Mayo, Sanford, and Avera health systems; countless other volunteers help make the clinic work. The clinic is open to anyone without health insurance. Ninety five percent of our patients are immigrants, refugees, and migrants. Many of our practitioners are also from different countries.

Six months ago we also opened up a free dental clinic with practitioners from the community and the Mayo Clinic. To date, we have seen more than 200 patients, 98% from our immigrant community.

Almost all of our patients tell us that their visits to the clinic have been the first time they have been treated with respect and have felt safe.

As a result of our medical clinic, we have uncovered the issue of rampant domestic violence within the immigrant community. Domestic violence, though it crosses all economic and cultural barriers, is a devastating reality in our immigrant communities. Domestic violence affects 1 in every 4 women in the United States. It has been reported that 48% of the Latinos and Africans reported that domestic

The United Nations High Commission of Refugees has estimated there are more than 200 million people migrating around the world: 30-40 million are undocumented, 24 million are internally displaced, 10 million are refugees.



violence increased since they immigrated to the States. Hispanic and some African communities face additional challenges – language barriers and lack of English proficiency can prevent victims from knowing their rights and available resources.

The threat of deportation is another fear. A spouse or significant other often destroys passports, identification, and any other valuable papers, and holds them hostage within their own home. Because family and community are the center of their lives, that often becomes another barrier to leaving an abusive situation. Given these strong values, many immigrants believe their families are supposed to stay together no matter what and that children are supposed to grow up with both parents.

In response to the pervasive domestic violence, OLGFC began a program called “Círculos de

Liderazgo” (Circles of Leadership) within the immigrant community. Immigrant men and women, mostly couples, that have experienced domestic violence, have become advocates and are working within their community to stop the cycle of violence.

PEDRO'S STORY

It was a bitterly cold day in Worthington, Minnesota. The thermometer read negative ten degrees and the wind chill made it feel like negative twenty-eight.

Mariana waited in the warmth of the rectory for Pedro to arrive. He had promised her months ago that one day they would go down the center aisle of St. Mary's Church and attend mass together. It was his dream and her hope. A slight smile crossed Mariana's face when we told her Pedro had arrived. He had kept his promise.

The mass was quite different than what they both expected, for today was Pedro's Mass of Christian Burial.

There are some people who come into your life and leave a lasting imprint on your heart. For me, Pedro was such a person. From the moment I met him at Our Lady of Guadalupe Free Clinic, I believed that Pedro was one of God's most beloved. Pedro was a man who lived the last eight months of his life filled with gratitude and love. He was so grateful for the Clinic, the practitioners, the volunteers and for the friends he made at the Clinic.

A few weeks after his visit to the Clinic, Pedro was admitted to the hospital. He was given medication and once the pain subsided, he kept thanking everyone affiliated with the Clinic for helping him. But, Pedro's road to Calvary had just begun.

Through a diagnosis of two brain tumors, numerous tests, procedures, and surgery, Pedro maintained a heart overflowing with gratitude. Knowing his condition was terminal, I asked him, "Pedro, what are you going to say to Jesus when you see him?" Without hesitation and with a smile, he replied, "I'm going to say thank you for giving me a wonderful life."

I was stunned by his response knowing his background and story. Leaving El Salvador at the age of 16, he traveled through Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico with four dollars in his pocket. He reached the border town of Nogales, Mexico, after a long six months. He knew he was coming to the end of his journey. There he met up with some fellow travelers, and for four days they had crossed the Sonoran Desert in temperatures that can often reach 118 degrees. Amid the challenges of the desert landscape, they traveled the "Trail of Tears" by night to make their way to the United States.

I asked Pedro why he was willing to risk his life. He stated, "I came from a very poor family and my father could barely support us. The little money he had he would spend on alcohol and then physically abuse my mother. The only way out was to come to the States, find a job, and send money home to my mother. Five years later, my mother died. At least I was able to send money home for her medication and to help put food on the table. When I think of everything I went through to help my family, some days I just wanted to die. I came to the States not because I wanted to, but because I had to. The worst part about being an immigrant is to be no one to anyone."

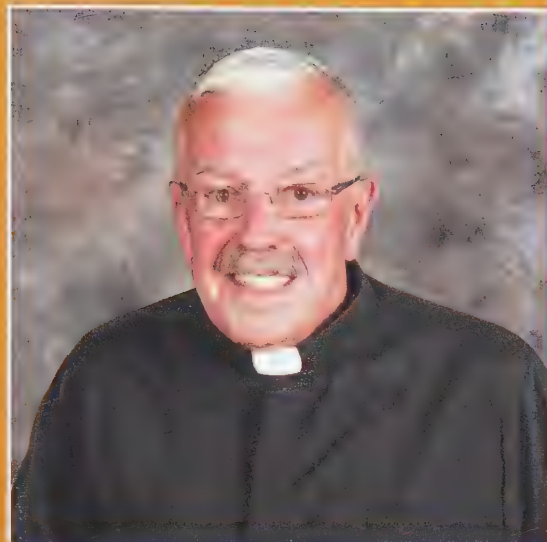
Pedro had been away from the Church for many years. He received the Sacrament of the Sick and at the conclusion of the celebration he was joyful, saying he had rediscovered his faith which he thought he had lost. "I came to the Clinic to be healed physically, but God saw I was in need of more important healing."

Over the last few months of Pedro's life I watched Mariana, our clinic manager, advocate for him. She accompanied him through all of his hospital procedures, spending hours with him giving him words of encouragement and love. I was struck by the presence of God made visible. As Mother Teresa once said, "Christ comes to us in the distressing disguise of the poor." Watching Mariana, it was as if she was ministering to Jesus, on the altar of Pedro's sick bed.

Pedro touched many lives in ways he could never have imagined. Thank you, Pedro, for showing us the face of "*El Salvador*."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Father Callaghan shared several powerful stories of immigrants – their physically and psychologically painful journey to freedom. In many ways, their perilous and dangerous journey to freedom was far different from the path most of us take toward freedom. And yet, ultimately the journey to any kind of freedom is ultimately the same. Consider the common factors on the journey to spiritual, physical or political freedom (for example, risk, loss of home and separation from family, rejection). In light of such a meditation on the common struggle for freedom, do you notice yourself being more “open” to people different than yourself?
2. In each of the stories Fr. Callaghan tells, the person undergoing great pain and much struggle offers a prayer of thanksgiving to God. Do I always see a reason for gratitude even in the midst of uncertainty and loss?
3. Do I see a connection between my own pilgrimage to spiritual freedom and loving concern for those whose pilgrimage involves great suffering? Does awareness of their suffering call forth from me a deeper conversion and greater generosity of spirit?
4. These stories cannot help but make us ask: Do I take my freedom for granted?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fr. Jim Callahan is a priest from the Diocese of Winona, Minnesota. Ordained in 1975 for the Society of African Missions, he has devoted most of his ministry working with immigrants, refugees, and migrants. He is the Co-Founder of Our Lady of Guadalupe Free Clinic in Worthington, Minnesota, which provides free medical and dental care for the medically uninsured. Presently, he is Pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Worthington, MN. The community is a multi-ethnic parish comprised of forty-three nationalities. He also works with All Day FORE Africa which provides community development for the peoples of Kibeho, Rwanda.



CAMINO: A JOURNEY INTO SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEB SHINDER BY MING ZENG
OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT





HD: You have made the Camino more times now! Congratulations! You must really love the experience. What initially drew you to be involved in the Camino? Was it watching Martin Shuster's movie *The Way*? The testimony of a friend? A desire for an encounter with the Lord? All of the above?

Shuster: I first became aware of the Camino de Santiago five and a half years ago when a friend recommended I read Kerry Egan's memoir "Humbling: A Pilgrimage Tale of Love, Grief, and Spiritual Renewal on the Camino de Santiago." Egan embarked on the Camino Frances after the death of her father. Following years of struggle juggling the roles of daughter, caregiver, student, employee and friend, his passing left her relieved, angry and confused. The Pilgrimage offered the space and freedom to reconcile her emotions and repair her relationship with the Lord. Perhaps my friend recognized some common ground between Egan and me.

I had my stint as caregiver a few years earlier when I abruptly left my graduate studies to become the primary caregiver for my mother-in-law and paternal grandparents. For six years, I navigated geriatric living facilities, care-plan meetings, and the slow deterioration of people I loved dearly and could not imagine losing. When the last of my seniors passed, I was grateful for the privilege of caring for them but physically and emotionally exhausted and uncertain of my life direction. Much to my surprise, I had no interest in returning to graduate school but felt an intense draw to Church ministry. With the encouragement of my pastor, I began taking classes at our local seminary and working in our RCIA ministry. Without much of a sabbatical, I transitioned from an all-consuming family commitment to a very different but equally demanding challenge. The story of Kerry's journey gave me pause and brought to light many of my unresolved issues surrounding relationships, personal achievement and most importantly my faith.

I embarked upon my first - and what I expected to be my only - Camino in the fall of 2012. Over the years, I walked segments of the Camino Frances, Via de la Plata, and Camino Portugues for a total of 469 kilometers, twice with my husband and twice with four friends. Each experience was unique in its scenic beauty, physical challenge, camaraderie, and spiritual enrichment. The first trip I carried dozens of petitions written by friends and acquaintances. I convinced myself I was walking for them but I no longer believe that is true. In the film *The Way*, the character Captain Henri asserts "you walk for yourself, only for yourself." I agree. No matter your companions, days (or weeks) of walking lead to a turning inward, personal reflection, and communion with the Creator. I found myself reviewing many experiences, life-decisions, and relationships. I perceived the Camino an eradicator of social and economic distinction. I saw long-forgotten friends in the faces of other pilgrims. I marveled

at the kindness and generosity of strangers. Most importantly, I talked with God and heard His voice in the Word proclaimed at the evening Pilgrim's Mass, in conversation with a fellow traveler, in the bellow of a hungry goat, and in the rustle of the eucalyptus tree. Like St. Ignatius, I truly began to find God in all things. I viewed aspects of my life with an unfamiliar clarity that kindled a desire for greater self-awareness and genuine intimacy with the Lord and others. The Camino changed me and generated a passion that has only deepened with time. While I strive to integrate the spirit of the Camino in everyday life, I hear the siren call of "Buen Camino!" I long to put on my boots and return to the beauty and serenity of the Galician countryside.

HD: The Camino is about physical movement but presumably, and more importantly, also spiritual movement or conversion. How has that happened for you? What insights of heart came to birth in you?

SHINDER: On the first day of my first Camino, physical and spiritual movement converged in a very dramatic way. As we approached the small town of Portomarin, the bridge spanning the Belesar reservoir cast a long shadow on the still water below. It was late in the afternoon, and we had hiked twenty-two kilometers in temperatures well into the 80's. The hike had been long and my strength was waning. The guidebook indicated our accommodations could be found at the other end of the long expanse of asphalt that stretched out before me. I yearned to kick off my boots, take a shower, and consume a simple meal of fresh fish and a chilled glass of local Albarino.

Gathering the little stamina I could muster, I put my head down and with determination trod across the pedestrian walkway of the viaduct. As I reached terra firma, I lifted my head and much to my dismay steep stairs leading up the arch of an old Roman bridge loomed large. Truly, I did not possess the strength



to climb the steps into town. I was crestfallen and my eyes filled with tears. If I could not manage one day of hiking, how could I complete five more? Why did I attempt this endeavor? Would I return home a failure? I was dizzy, nauseous, embarrassed, angry, and afraid!

Suddenly, the most obvious became strikingly apparent to me. Of course, I could not make it up the stairs – on my own! I closed my eyes, reached behind my back and put my hand on my Pilgrim's Shell, marked with the cross of Santiago. I prayed one of the most honest and humble prayers of my life, "Dear Lord, I know I can only do this with Your help. Only with You, can I climb these stairs. Only with You, can I complete this Camino. Only with You can I live my life well." I kept my head down and began moving up, one step at a time. I thought of nothing but the movement of one foot after the other and suddenly in what seemed only moments "we" reached the top of the stairs! Certainly, the Lord has been with me every day and every moment of my life; however, on that scorching late September day, perhaps for the first time, I acknowledged and proclaimed my deep desire and need for His love and guiding presence in my life.

Three years later I walked the Camino Frances again. As I traveled through the Minho Valley, I remembered my first ascent of the Portomarin Roman bridge and wondered... It was another hot day. The bridge had not changed. Once again, for each of the forty-six steps I lifted one foot after the other but this time I was different. At the top, gazing out at the sprawling countryside, I gave thanks for all that has been and all that will be, confident that I never need face any challenge alone.

HD: Typically a pilgrimage requires some physical hardship or discomfort (a penitential motivation for some); at the minimum there is a "loss of self" to accommodate local circumstances and inconveniences. While a tourist seeks

entertainment and distraction from pain, the pilgrim wants to be graced and seeks to find joy, meaning and fulfillment in all that is unusual and unplanned. Have you – or those on pilgrimage with you – had this type of experience of "letting go" and/or "surprise?" Was the Camino an experience of cultural "immersion" (new language, food, schedule, etc.) and did that help you better relate to your work with people coming to RCIA from a completely different background than your own (i.e. without the language and Catholic cultural heritage, etc.)?

Shinder: As I prepared for my first Camino, I was very concerned that the trip retain a structured, restrained, penitential character. For several months I trained, diligently walking – with a weighted backpack – three miles in the morning and six miles each evening. On the trail, we stayed in modest guest houses and dined on the traditional pilgrim's menu fare. Although we packed much more gear than needed, simple self-sufficiency was the goal. The days were long, muscles ached, and sleep came easily. In each village we were blessed by an evening Pilgrim's Mass and our first stop in Santiago was at the Tomb of St. James. On the flight home, confident of my role as a "good pilgrim," I reflected upon many grace-filled moments and knew insights would come as I continued to "un-pack" the experience. Truly, I was blessed.

On the Pilgrimages that followed, routes and companions changed. I matured – physically and spiritually. I was easier on myself and more open to experience. I immersed myself in the culture of Galicia – dining on pulpo (octopus) borrachinhos (rich bread pudding soaked in port), dancing in the street on the feast of a local patron saint, and indulging in the custom of siesta. I moved beyond my comfort zone and engaged in conversation with locals and other pilgrims. Although we communicated with a few words in English, Spanish, Galician and the universal language of hand gestures,

I sensed a connection and common purpose. I ventured off the trail to explore fields of sunflowers, old abandoned churches and the workshops of local craftspeople. By reducing self-imposed constraints and living in the moment, I opened my heart and soul to God's great gift to me. I embraced the Camino in its entirety. This was not a self-indulgent free-for-all but a very unique opportunity to enter a sacred space where food, nature, and shared reflection became the impetus for spiritual insight and growth.

A wide variety of alberques, inns, and hotels pepper the routes to Santiago de Compostela. Although the quality and character vary greatly, most lodgings are safe, clean, and the hosts are welcoming and kind. By the end of a long day of hiking, no matter the condition, I readily accepted each casa de invitados as simply part of the Camino experience – until Caldas de Reyes.

That afternoon, at the end of a long and winding climb, my companions and I turned to face a traditional Galician stone wall adorned with an elegant but simply lettered sign that read “El Torre do Rio.” Double ornate wrought iron gates separated us from a remarkably restored 18th century textile complex surrounded by impeccably landscaped grounds. We entered the property awestruck at the incredible beauty before us. The Umia River meandered along the perimeter of the grounds and an offshoot fed a waterfall flowing into a deep pool. Rose petals carpeted the entrance to the main house. Sweaty and smelly we entered the main house laden with backpacks, duffel bags and trekking poles. We were embarrassed, ill-at-ease, and convinced someone – most likely me – had made a mistake. A tall young woman dressed in black and a long white apron greeted us warmly. “Monya” assured us our reservation was in order, escorted us to rooms and offered a tour of the estate and gardens. Surrounded by such incredible heavenly and man-made beauty and mindful of the sacrificial intent of pilgrimage,

I was extremely conflicted. Where was the restraint of comfort and consumption? How could I justify to my fellow pilgrims and myself the obvious shift from simplicity of circumstance to luxury and extravagance? Where was God's hand in this unintended turn of events?

For the next sixteen hours I wandered lush gardens, savored gourmet cuisine, slept beneath fine linen, and pondered the meaning of this unexpected diversion. Every possible need or whim was anticipated and eagerly met by Monya. She carried luggage, served meals, lit candles, turned down the bed. It appeared that no task was too trivial or mundane but most impressive was her ever present gentle, caring demeanor. She found great joy in humble service.

At my parish, hospitality is a guiding principle of our mission; however, while I value and enjoy all aspects of my ministry, at times it is a struggle to reconcile expectations, resources and reality. This year, I began my Camino Portugues just three weeks after Easter and I was worn down by the demands of the season and feeling a bit more like Martha than Mary. Now thousands of miles away, with a soundtrack of the running river, I sat on my balcony and considered my opulent but tranquil surroundings.

It became clear to me: Monya's witness was the purpose of my visit to “El Torre do Rio.” In my ministry, I had become angry and bitter over seemingly insignificant or less-valued tasks. Here, Monya had chosen the better part! Without hesitation or judgment, she opens her heart and hands to all. With great dignity and love, she manifests Christ's love. Continuing on the trail the next morning, with greater humility, I began to reexamine my attitude about hospitality and service.

HD: This issue of HD is on the theme of pilgrimage as a metaphor or means to greater personal freedom; the ultimate journey is the journey inward, living at a far deeper level than external



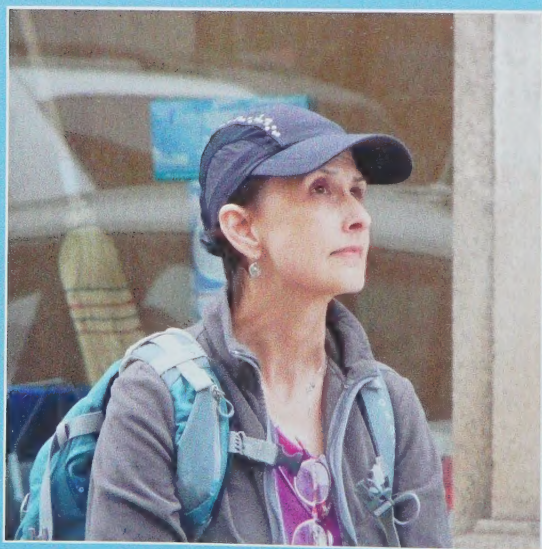
attractions and desires, etc. Are you a more “free” or spiritually detached person because of your Camino experiences?

It is often said a pilgrimage really only begins when you return home and it is on home terrain with the usual routine distractions that we can begin to implement a new way of thinking and acting. Have you found that to be true in your life and your pilgrimage experience?

Shinder: After completing four segments in five years, my love for the Camino has not diminished; in fact, I feel even stronger the lure of Santiago. Certainly, any vacation can provide freedom from the routine distractions of work, popular culture and family responsibilities, but a pilgrimage, specifically the Camino de Santiago, offers much more. No matter the company, days of hiking six to eight hours exhausts conversation and from within rises the desire for silence, prayer and contemplation. In time, sharing thoughts with a companion helps clarify insights, strengthen bonds and promote spiritual development. Thus develops a delicate ebb and flow of speech and silence, reflection and disclosure. This

process naturally lends to a deepening relationship with self, others and the Lord.

The Camino has changed me in many ways. I have grown physically stronger and found a great sense of personal achievement. I have learned to respect and admire the Galician people and their rich cultural heritage. I have developed deeper bonds with each of my traveling companions. I have grown more open to new people and experiences. Most importantly, on dusty trails, in driving rain, and kneeling before the altar in Santiago, I have talked unabashedly with God about every aspect of my life, heart to heart. I know He has always been at my side patiently waiting but on the Camino I found the freedom to open myself to the wonders of genuine relationship with Him. Experiencing that intimacy has enabled me to better acknowledge and accept my personal weaknesses and strengths. I judge less and seek reconciliation more. I know we are all much more alike than different. Particular circumstances may separate us but we truly are One Body, living the Camino of our lives.



ABOUT DEB SHINDER

Deb Shinder is Pastoral Associate at Holy Name Parish, Birmingham with special responsibilities for Adult Faith Formation (including RCIA) and Christian Service programming and advocacy.

Making the Camino several times has been an excellent complement for her extensive studies in Ignatian Spirituality.

The Journey of the Magi

by T.S. Elliot



A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.
And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
and running away, and wanting their liquor and
women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the
darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the
lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and
death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.



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